

Temporal arteritis

Definition:

Temporal arteritis is inflammation and damage to the blood vessels that supply blood to the head. It is also called Giant cell arteritis.

Causes, incidence, and risk factors:

It occurs when one or more arteries become inflamed, swollen, and tender. It commonly occurs in the arteries around the temples (temporal arteries). These vessels branch off from the carotid artery in the neck. The cause of the condition is unknown. It is believed to be due in part to a faulty immune response. The problem may develop with or following another inflammatory disorder known as polymyalgia Rheumatica. Giant cell arteritis almost always occurs in people over age 50. The condition may run in families.

Symptoms:

Some common symptoms of this problem are

- Throbbing headache on one side of the head or the back of the head
- Tenderness when touching the scalp

Other symptoms such as

- Excessive sweating
- Fever
- General ill feeling
- Jaw pain that comes and goes or occurs when chewing
- Loss of appetite
- Muscle aches
- Pain and stiffness in the neck, upper arms, shoulder, and hips
- Weakness, excessive tiredness

Problems with eyesight may occur, and at times may begin suddenly

- Blurred vision
- Double vision
- Reduced vision (blindness in one or both eyes)

Other symptoms that may occur with this disease:

- Bleeding gums
- Face pain
- Hearing loss
- Joint stiffness

Signs and tests:

The doctor will examine your head.

- The scalp is often sensitive to touch
- There may be a tender, thick artery on one side of the head, most often over one or both temples.

Blood tests may include:

- Hemoglobin or hematocrit
- Liver function tests
- Sedimentation rate and C-reactive protein

Blood tests alone cannot provide a diagnosis. You will need to have a biopsy (tissue sample) from the involved artery. The biopsy is done on an outpatient basis.

You may also have other tests, including:

- MRI
- PET scan

Treatment:

Receiving treatment right away is key to preventing severe problems such as blindness or even stroke.

Most of the time, your doctor will prescribe corticosteroids medicines. These medicines are often started even before a biopsy is done. Your doctor may also tell you to take aspirin.

Most people begin to feel better within a few days after starting treatment. However, you will require to take medicine for longer duration. The dose of corticosteroids will be cut back very slowly.

Long-term treatment with corticosteroid medicines can make bones thinner and increase your chance of a fracture. You will need to take the following steps to protect your bone strength.

- Avoid smoking and excess alcohol intake
- Start walking or other forms of weight-bearing exercises

You may also need to take other medications that suppress the immune system.

Prognosis:

Long term treatment is required. The condition may return at a later date. In some cases despite adequate treatment, vision may return completely. Damage to other blood vessels in the body such as aneurysms (ballooning of the blood vessels) may occur. This damage can lead to a stroke in the future.