

Granulomatosis With Polyangiitis & You

What is it?



Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA) is also known as Wegener's granulomatosis. It is a rare inflammatory disorder that affects very small blood vessels and tissues in the respiratory tract including the sinuses, nasal cavity, airways and lungs.

The exact cause of GPA is unknown at this time, but it is thought to be an autoimmune disease. This means that something triggers your immune system to go awry. It begins to attack small blood vessels and tissues resulting in inflammation.



GPA is like a fire in your small blood vessels

The word inflammation comes from the Latin word *inflammare* which means to light on fire. You can think of GPA like a fire in the small blood vessels and tissues. Putting out the fire of GPA early is important. You want to get that fire out as quickly as possible so it doesn't cause damage. Once the damage from GPA is done it cannot be reversed.

Treating GPA aggressively is also essential. Using the same fire analogy, we've called in the fire department. Now we need to make sure we have the right tools to put out the fire. We don't want a bucket and water. We want a fire truck with a big hose. The faster we can get that fire out the less damage is done and the better things will be in the long run.

What is it going to do to me?



Granulomatosis with polyangiitis often starts slowly. Symptoms of fever, tiredness, aching muscles and weight loss are common. Often people with GPA have had ongoing problems with their airways including chronic (long-term) sinus problems, frequent nose bleeds, nose and/or mouth sores, ear infections, shortness of breath, chronic cough and sometimes coughing up blood.

Inflammation of small blood vessels in other tissues and organs can also occur. The disease can cause joint or muscle aches and pain, a skin rash, or inflammation of the eyes. GPA can also affect the kidneys, nerves or the tissue around the heart.

Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about GPA and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

What can I do about it?



Granulomatosis with polyangiitis is a very serious disease. Luckily, there are effective treatments available. Even if they don't cure GPA, they can make living with the condition much more comfortable.

If you have GPA or think you may have it, your family doctor should refer you to a specialist immediately. A rheumatologist is one of the best people to help you manage your condition.

People with GPA can lead active and productive lives with the right kind of treatment. It is essential to treat GPA early and aggressively. Don't wait. There is great treatment available that can help you get back to leading a full life.

Medications for GPA fall into two broad groups:

- **Induction therapies** – used initially to quickly get the disease under control
- **Maintenance therapies** – used to control the disease over the long term

Exercise is an important part of the treatment plan for GPA. Regular physical activity can help you manage fatigue and keep a healthy weight. A trained arthritis physiotherapist can design a program tailored to your specific needs.

Here are some other recommendations:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your rheumatologist appointments regularly**
- **Get your blood tests regularly as suggested by your rheumatologist**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat GPA**
- **If you smoke, try to quit**