

Microscopic Polyangiitis & You

What is it?



Microscopic polyangiitis (MPA) is a rare but serious disease that causes inflammation of the small blood vessels. It most commonly affects the kidneys, but the lungs, skin, nerves and other tissues can also be involved.

The cause of MPA 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 causes inflammation. This can cut off blood supply to vital organs.



MPA is like a fire in your small blood vessels and organs

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

Treating MPA 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?



It can be difficult to diagnose MPA in the early stages. That's because the first signs can often be similar to having the flu. People start feeling unwell and commonly have a fever, feel tired and achy, and may lose weight.

Other symptoms of MPA really depend on which organs are affected. If the kidneys are involved, symptoms could include feeling tired, swelling of the legs or shortness of breath. If the lungs are involved, you may notice shortness of breath, a cough, or chest pain/discomfort.

Signs of MPA can also appear on the skin. Little red dots called purpura can appear on the skin. This can look like little bruises. This usually affects the legs. Signs of MPA can also occur in the eyes (redness or pain), nerves (sudden loss of strength) and joints (pain & swelling).

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

What can I do about it?



MPA is a serious but treatable disease. If you have MPA, your family doctor should refer you to a specialist right away. MPA needs to be treated early and aggressively. Early treatment makes you much more likely to get into remission (no more symptoms and markers of inflammation are back to normal).

People with MPA can lead active and productive lives with the right kinds of treatment. Corticosteroids such as prednisone are used right away to control the inflammation of MPA. Another medication called cyclophosphamide is often prescribed around the same time to induce remission. After 6 months, once the disease is under control, cyclophosphamide is switched to azathioprine (Imuran) or methotrexate. For people who can't take cyclophosphamide, a medication called rituximab (Rituxan) is a promising alternative. In people with milder disease, prednisone along with azathioprine or methotrexate may be all that is needed.

Here are some other recommendations on what you should do:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your rheumatologist appointments regularly**
- **Get your blood tests regularly as suggested by your rheumatologist**
- **Reduce your risk of heart disease**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat MPA**