

Wegener's Granulomatosis

What is Wegener's Granulomatosis?

Wegener's granulomatosis is a general inflammation of the medium and small blood vessels.

Blood flows through your body in blood vessels called veins and arteries. Large arteries branch into medium, small and very small ones. Veins also have large, medium, small and very small branches. Arteries move blood, oxygen and nutrients to all of the cells in your body. Veins take waste products back to your kidneys, bowels and lungs for your body to get rid of.

With Wegener's granulomatosis, the arteries and veins around the lungs and kidneys are inflamed. This limits the blood flow to these important organs. Normal cells and tissues are destroyed, as they cannot get proper nutrition to live and grow.

What causes Wegener's granulomatosis?

There is no known cause for this problem.

What are the symptoms of Wegener's granulomatosis?

It is very hard to tell when you have Wegener's granulomatosis. The symptoms are not clear.

There are 3 common areas of the body involved:

- upper respiratory tract
- lungs
- kidneys

Symptoms in the upper respiratory tract:

Symptoms in the upper respiratory tract are often the first to appear.

- You may have sinus pain.
- You may have a runny nose called rhinorrhea. This does not clear up with common medications and treatments and can get worse over time. The constant inflammation can cause pain. Ulcers may form in the nose and bloody discharge comes out.
- An ulcer in the nose can cause a hole in the centre cartilage. The nose may collapse as a result. This is called saddle-nose.

When the lungs are involved:

Most of the time, lungs are involved although you may not feel any problems. You may have chest pain, shortness of breath, a cough or a cough with blood.

When the kidneys are involved:

For many people, kidneys are involved although you may not feel any symptoms. You may have blood in your urine found on a urine test.

Other symptoms:

- You may feel weak, tired, have joint pain and swelling. Most people do not have permanent joint damage from this disease.
- You may have inflammation in your eyes that causes redness, burning and pain. If you have double vision or problems seeing, get help right away.
- Skin problems are common ranging from small red or purple raised spots to blisters and ulcers that may or may not be painful.
- You may have fever and night sweats. You may have an infection that needs treatment.

Who gets Wegener's granulomatosis?

This is a rare disease. It can affect males and females at any age. It mostly affects Caucasians or white skinned people.

What tests are done to see if I have Wegener's granulomatosis?

Blood tests may help confirm or exclude the diagnosis of Wegener's. Blood tests are done to see what organ may be affected and to see if there are any other causes for your problems.

Red blood cells and other changes can be seen in the urine if the kidneys are involved. Kidney function tests may also show that you have this disease.

Chest X-rays and CT scans are also done to check the lungs.

A tissue biopsy may also be done. A needle is inserted into a problem area and a sample of tissue is taken. The sample is then looked at under a microscope.

How is Wegener's granulomatosis treated?

There are medications that can help. Most people need a combination of medications. These medications work together to suppress the body's immune system. This helps control the problem.

These are very strong medications and your doctor must follow you carefully. Your doctor and pharmacist will give you more information about any medication that may be in your treatment plan.

You will also have regular blood tests to monitor the disease.

When your immune system is suppressed by treatment, you have less resistance to infection. Your doctor will work with you on ways to prevent infection.

Can Wegener's granulomatosis be prevented?

Research has not found a way to prevent this disease. However, early diagnosis can help control the progress of this problem.

See a doctor or health care provider if you have cold symptoms that do not go away.

