

INFORMATION

information



VICTORIA

inc. OSTEOPOROSIS VICTORIA

POLYMYALGIA RHEUMATICA

What is it?

Polymyalgia rheumatica is a condition associated with moderate to severe muscle pain and stiffness in the neck, shoulder and hip area. It can develop very rapidly (eg: overnight) or more gradually.

Why does it occur?

The cause of polymyalgia rheumatica is unknown. Genetic and environmental factors may play a role

Who does it affect?

Polymyalgia rheumatica mainly affects those over 50 years, with the average age being 70. It affects more women than men, and more caucasians than any other race. Whilst the condition is unusual, it is by no means rare.

The symptoms

Symptoms may include any of the following:

- Moderate to severe stiffness and pain near the neck, shoulders and hips. This is often more severe upon waking or after inactivity.
- Fever
- Weight loss
- Lethargy

Polymyalgia rheumatica is sometimes associated with a potentially serious problem called temporal arteritis. This condition causes inflammation in the arteries around the head and causes a severe headache and sometimes visual changes. If either of these symptoms occur you should see your doctor promptly. A diagnosis of temporal arteritis is generally made after a small piece of artery

from your forehead is taken and examined under a microscope. Temporal arteritis may cause permanent visual loss if left untreated.

Outlook

Without treatment polymyalgia rheumatica may last an average of 3-5 years. With treatment, symptoms can resolve within a few days and complications are rare.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis will usually involve a physical examination, medical history and blood tests. Blood tests help to rule out other causes of the symptoms and support a suspected diagnosis of polymyalgia rheumatica.

Management

The treatment of choice for polymyalgia rheumatica is corticosteroid medication, usually prednisolone. Occasionally anti-inflammatory medications may be used. Appropriate exercise may also be of benefit.

Education

A better understanding of polymyalgia rheumatica will greatly assist you in making decisions about the management of your condition. Arthritis Victoria's education programs can assist you to develop the skills and knowledge needed to make these decisions. They also provide opportunities to meet others in similar situations. Arthritis Victoria can also put you in touch with local support groups, other relevant organizations and appropriate exercise groups for your condition.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Resource Centre

- Lorig, Kate and Fries, James (2000), *The arthritis helpbook: A tested self-management program for coping with arthritis and fibromyalgia*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, Reading, MA.
- *The Arthritis Foundations tips for good living with arthritis* (2001), Arthritis Foundation of America, Atlanta, GA.

*All listed books are available on loan from the Arthritis Victoria Resource Centre to members. If you would like to find out more about becoming a member call: (03) 8531 8000.

Courses

Arthritis Victoria Self management courses and exercise classes. Call 03 8531 8000 for information on the course or class most suited to your needs.

Websites

- Arthritis Vic: www.arthritisvic.org.au
- Arthritis USA: www.arthritis.org
- Arthritis Rsearch Campaign UK www.arc.org.uk
- National Institute for Arthritis, Musculoskeletal and Skin: www.nih.gov/niams
- American College of Rheumatology: www.rheumatology.org
- Medlineplus: www.medlineplus.gov

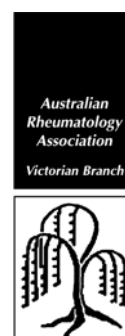
Support/Self Help Groups

For information about the support group nearest you, phone our Community Development Co-ordinator on (03) 8531 8000

ARTHRITIS VICTORIA

If you would like further information please contact our telephone information service on

(03) 8531 8000 or **1800 011 041** (country callers)



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Prepared by Education & Services staff, Arthritis Victoria, November 2002. This material is for your information and is not intended to be medical advice. You are encouraged to review the information provided with your doctor or relevant health professional.