



# Calderdale and Huddersfield

## NHS Foundation Trust

### Patient Information Leaflet

#### Giant Cell Arteritis (GCA)

#### What is Giant Cell Arteritis (GCA)?

Giant Cell Arteritis (GCA), sometimes called temporal arteritis, is inflammation (swelling) of the arteries, particularly those in the head around the temples. Inflammation narrows the blood vessels and reduces blood flow. If not treated promptly, GCA can lead to serious complications including permanent loss of vision.

#### Common symptoms

- A new or severe headache (often around the temples)
- Scalp tenderness or pain when brushing your hair
- Pain in the jaw when chewing (jaw claudication)
- Blurred or double vision
- Sudden loss of vision (medical emergency)
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Unexplained weight loss

GCA most commonly affects people aged over 50 years.

#### What causes GCA?

The exact cause is unknown. It is thought to occur when the immune system mistakenly attacks the lining of blood vessels.

- Increasing age (over 50 years)
- Genetic factors or family history
- Immune system dysfunction
- Association with polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR)
- Possible environmental triggers

## Treatment

Treatment should begin immediately if GCA is suspected to reduce the risk of permanent sight loss.

### Steroid medication (Prednisolone)

Benefits:

- Quickly reduces inflammation
- Relieves symptoms
- Helps prevent permanent vision loss

Possible side effects:

- Weight gain
- High blood pressure
- Increased risk of infection
- Osteoporosis (bone thinning) with long-term use

### Bone protection

Calcium, vitamin D or other medicines may be prescribed to reduce the risk of steroid-related bone thinning and fractures.

### Immunosuppressant medicines

Some patients require additional medicines if steroids alone are not effective or cause significant side effects. These medicines help control inflammation but can increase the risk of infection.

## Monitoring

Regular blood tests and clinic appointments are important to ensure treatment is working safely and effectively.

### Possible complications

- Permanent vision loss
- Stroke
- Aortic aneurysm
- Steroid-related complications such as diabetes, osteoporosis and infection

### When should I seek urgent medical help?

Attend the Emergency Department immediately if you develop:

- Sudden loss of vision
- Blurred or double vision
- A severe new headache
- Jaw pain when chewing
- Weakness on one side of the body
- Difficulty speaking

**Who should I contact?**

Contact the Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) team if you have concerns about your steroid medication, treatment side effects, follow-up care, or worsening symptoms.

Contact your GP if you have persistent headaches, ongoing fatigue, medication queries or any general concerns about your condition.

**Contact information**

If you have concerns after leaving SDEC, please contact:

SDEC / Hospital Advice Line: \_\_\_\_\_

GP: \_\_\_\_\_

Out of hours: NHS 111

In an emergency, call 999.