



# Polymyalgia rheumatica

## Overview

Polymyalgia rheumatica is an inflammatory condition. It causes joint and muscle pain and stiffness, mainly in the shoulders and hips. Symptoms of polymyalgia rheumatica (pol-e-my-AL-juh rue-MAT-ih-kuh) may begin quickly or come on over several days to weeks. Symptoms are most often worse in the morning.

Most people who get polymyalgia rheumatica are older than 65. It rarely affects people younger than 50.

This condition is related to another inflammatory condition called giant cell arteritis. Giant cell arteritis can cause headaches, vision troubles, jaw pain and scalp tenderness. Some people have polymyalgia rheumatica and giant cell arteritis.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of polymyalgia rheumatica most often affect both sides of the body. They might include:

- Aches or pain in the shoulders.
- Aches or pain in the neck, upper arms, buttocks, hips or thighs.
- Stiffness in affected areas, mainly in the morning or after not being active for a time.
- Less range of motion in affected areas.
- Pain or stiffness in the wrists, elbows or knees.

Other symptoms might include:

- Mild fever.
- Tiredness.
- A feeling of not being well, called malaise.
- Not wanting to eat.
- Weight loss that happens without trying.
- Being depressed.

## When to see a doctor

See your healthcare professional if you have aches, pains or stiffness that:

- Is new.
- Keeps you from sleeping well.
- Makes it hard to do daily activities, such as getting dressed.

## Causes

Experts don't know the cause of polymyalgia rheumatica. But genes may be part of the cause. Certain genes and gene changes might raise the risk of polymyalgia rheumatica.

Researchers are studying other causes of the condition.

### **Giant cell arteritis**

Polymyalgia rheumatica and another condition known as giant cell arteritis are alike in many ways. Many people who have one of these conditions also have symptoms of the other.

Giant cell arteritis causes swelling and irritation, also called inflammation, in the lining of blood vessels called arteries. This inflammation often affects the arteries in the temples. But it also can affect other medium and large blood vessels, such as those to the heart.

Symptoms include headaches, jaw pain, trouble seeing and scalp tenderness. Sometimes, fever and weight loss may be the first symptoms. If not treated, polymyalgia rheumatica can lead to a stroke or blindness.

## Risk factors

Risk factors for polymyalgia rheumatica include:

- **Older age.** Polymyalgia rheumatica affects mainly older adults. It most often happens between ages 70 and 80.
- **Being assigned female at birth.** People assigned female at birth are about 2 to 3 times more likely to get the condition than are people assigned male at birth.
- **White race.** Polymyalgia rheumatica is most common among white people from Scandinavia or northern Europe.

## Complications

Symptoms of polymyalgia rheumatica can make it hard to do daily activities, such as:

- Getting out of bed, standing up from a chair or getting out of a car.
- Combing the hair or bathing.
- Getting dressed.

These complications can affect your health, social life, physical activity, sleep and well-being.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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