

TAKAYASU'S ARTERITIS

WHAT IS TAKAYASU'S ARTERITIS (TA)?

Takayasu's arteritis (tah-kah-YAH-sooz ahr-tuh-RIE-tis) is a rare type of vasculitis, a group of disorders that cause blood vessel inflammation. In Takayasu's arteritis, the inflammation damages the aorta — the large artery that carries blood from your heart to the rest of your body — and its main branches. The disease can lead to narrowed or blocked arteries, or to weakened artery walls that may bulge and tear (aneurysm).

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms that are common when TA first develops includes: lack of energy, weight loss, weakness and low-grade fever. Symptoms that affect the blood vessels take time to develop. As the disease progresses the arms and legs may become cool. Later, claudication or pain with use may develop. Other symptoms include joint pain, muscle weakness and pain, and skin lesions. If the vessels supplying blood to the heart or lungs become affected, people may develop chest pain, myocardial infarction (heart attack). Anemia (low blood count) is present in most patients and results in a general feeling of weakness and fatigue.

TREATMENT

Treatment of Takayasu's arteritis focuses on controlling the inflammation with medications and preventing further damage to your blood vessels. The first line of treatment is usually with a corticosteroid, such as prednisone. If your condition doesn't respond well to corticosteroids, your doctor may prescribe immunosuppressant drugs. Examples are methotrexate, azathioprine (Imuran) and leflunomide (Arava). Your doctor may suggest drugs that correct abnormalities in the immune system (biologics). Examples are etanercept (Enbrel), infliximab (Remicade, Inflectra) and tocilizumab (Actemra).