

VASCULITIS & GENERAL HEALTH



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Cardiovascular health

Vasculitis can lead to vessel damage and dysfunction, but also faster and earlier cholesterol build-up in the blood vessels, which can all lead to delayed or long-term health effects, such as high blood pressure and an increased risk of heart attacks or strokes.

Your **family doctor** can monitor the health of your heart and blood vessels by doing the following:

- ✓ Ensuring your blood pressure is at target based on current guidelines.
- ✓ Checking your bloodwork for blood sugar and cholesterol levels. Being on prednisone for long periods of time can cause diabetes and high cholesterol. Medications can be prescribed if you develop these conditions.

You can help with managing your health too!

- ✓ Quit cigarette smoking. Ask your doctor for resources to help with this.
- ✓ Keep physically active. The best exercises are the ones that you enjoy!
- ✓ Check your blood pressure a few times a month. Make sure you are in a relaxed and quiet environment. Your blood pressure might be artificially higher at the doctor's office because of feeling anxious or rushed.

Bone health

Taking prednisone for a long time can weaken your bones, leading to a condition called "osteoporosis". This can cause fractures of the spine, wrist, and hips after only minimal traumas. Make sure you are protected with the following:

- ✓ Vitamin D (at least 1000IU) daily.
- ✓ Sufficient calcium intake every day (around 1200mg, through diet and supplement combined).
- ✓ Other bone-protecting medications may be needed which include risedronate, alendronate, or denosumab.
- ✓ Bone Mineral Density (BMD) testing every 2-5 years depending on risk factors.

Vaccinations

Ensure you are up-to-date with your regular vaccines, and strongly consider these ones (ask your GP about them):

- ✓ Pneumonia vaccine(s)
- ✓ Annual flu vaccine
- ✓ Shingles inactivated vaccine
- ✓ COVID-19 vaccine

Infections

- ✓ If you develop an infection or fever, you might need to temporarily stop ("hold") your immunosuppressive medication. However, NEVER stop them yourself before discussing with a doctor.
- ✓ Your rheumatologist will give you further instructions on which medication(s) need to be held.

Malignancy/cancer screening

- ✓ Immunosuppressive medications also increase the risk of certain types of skin cancers.
- ✓ In addition to routine cancer screening with your GP, based on your age and other risk factors, ensure you are watching out for new skin lesions (usually over sun-exposed areas of the body).
- ✓ If you have received a high total dose of cyclophosphamide, your rheumatologist may request urine tests to screen for bladder irritation or, rarely, bladder cancer. If there are concerning features, you may be referred to a urologist for further testing including a cystoscopy.