

ANCA vasculitis

Inflammation of small blood vessels

An autoimmune disease that can affect the kidneys and other organs. It needs prompt treatment, and treatment works well for many people.

What is it?

Vasculitis means inflamed blood vessels. In ANCA vasculitis, the immune system makes antibodies called ANCA that set off white blood cells to attack small blood vessels. It can affect the kidneys, lungs, sinuses, nose, ears, eyes, skin and nerves. The main types are granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA) and microscopic polyangiitis (MPA).

In the kidneys, it can make kidney function drop quickly, over days to weeks. This needs urgent treatment.

Who gets it?

It's rare, and most common in people over 50. The cause isn't fully known.

What you might notice

- fever, tiredness, weight loss, or aching muscles or joints
- a crusty nose, nosebleeds or sinus problems that don't go away
- cough, shortness of breath or coughing up blood
- rash, numbness or tingling
- blood in the urine, swelling or passing less urine

How it's found

A blood test for ANCA, urine and blood tests, a **kidney biopsy**, and chest imaging or other tests as needed.

How it's treated

- **First, to control the disease:** steroids plus another medicine that calms the immune system, often given through a vein. Some very sick people also need plasma exchange, a treatment that filters the blood.
- **Then, to prevent relapse:** lower-dose medicines, usually for several years.
- Some people need dialysis at first. Kidney function can improve with treatment.
- You may also get medicines to protect your bones and stomach, and an antibiotic to prevent a type of lung infection.

What you can do

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Don't stop steroids suddenly.
- Keep all appointments and tests. The disease can come back.
- Ask which vaccines you should have, since treatment raises infection risk.
- Tell your team early about new symptoms, and don't smoke.

Get help right away

- **Call 911** if you're coughing up blood or have severe shortness of breath.
- Contact your team or go to emergency for fever or chills while on treatment, or much less urine than usual.

Learn more: Vasculitis Foundation Canada, vasculitis.ca. Kidney Foundation of Canada, kidney.ca.

General information only. This sheet doesn't replace advice from your own health care team. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Dr. Shemer Ratner, Nephrology, Sudbury, Ontario. Last updated October 2026.