

Inflammatory disease causes blindness

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People suffering from a type of connective tissue disease characterized by inflammation of arteries in the head are three times more likely to experience blindness, new Geisinger research shows.

In a study published in a recent edition of the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*, Geisinger researchers examined a disorder known as temporal arteritis. In this disease, arteries swell and restrict blood flow to the brain.

Temporal arteritis can cause headaches, jaw soreness and flu-like symptoms. Untreated, the disease can lead to blindness or stroke. The average age for disease onset is 70.

Giant cells, which are white blood cells that destroy bacteria, are often found in patients with the disease. The Geisinger study found that patients with giant cells are far more prone to blindness compared to patients without these cells.

The study also found that patients with giant cells are three times more likely to experience Polymyalgia rheumatica, an inflammatory disorder that causes muscle aches and stiffness primarily in the arms, thighs and neck.

"We need to learn more about how these giant cells work so we can limit the effects of this disease, which can cause significant problems if ignored," said Geisinger rheumatologist and lead study author Thomas Harrington, MD.

Source: Geisinger Health System

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