

The specific underlying cause of vasculitis is not fully understood. However, in most cases, vasculitis is thought to be due to disturbances of the body's immune system. Some forms of vasculitis may be due to allergic reactions or hypersensitivity to certain medications such as sulfur drugs, penicillin, propylthiouracil, other drugs, toxins, or other inhaled environmental irritants. Other forms may occur due to fungal, parasitic, or viral infections. In some instances, it is thought that vasculitis may be an autoimmune disorder. Autoimmune disorders are caused when the body's natural defenses against "foreign" or invading organisms (e.g., antibodies) begin to attack healthy tissue for unknown reasons. Because of the wide range of symptoms and body systems involved, an extensive history and physical exam is needed before a clear diagnosis of the type of vasculitis can be made. In some cases, an x-ray of the blood vessels using dye (angiogram), or a biopsy of the affected organ may be recommended to give an accurate diagnosis and to insure proper treatment.