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Home Illnesses and conditions Muscle, bone and joints Conditions Polymyalgia rheumatica Polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) is a condition that causes pain, stiffness and inflammation in the muscles around the shoulders, neck and hips. The main symptom is muscle stiffness in the morning that lasts longer than 45 minutes. It may also cause other symptoms, including: If you have pain and stiffness that lasts longer than a week, you should see your GP so the cause can be investigated. Diagnosing polymyalgia rheumatica can be difficult because the symptoms are similar to those of many other conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis. These conditions will need to be ruled out before polymyalgia rheumatica is diagnosed. Read more about the symptoms of polymyalgia rheumatica and diagnosing polymyalgia rheumatica. The cause of polymyalgia rheumatica is unknown, but a combination of genetic and environmental factors is thought to be responsible. Polymyalgia rheumatica is relatively common in the UK. It’s estimated that one in every 1,200 people develop the condition every year. Polymyalgia rheumatica is age-related. Most people who are diagnosed with the condition are over 70. It’s extremely rare in people younger than 50. It’s also more common in women than men. The main treatment for polymyalgia rheumatica is a coritcosteroid medication called prednisolone, which is used to help relieve the symptoms. You’ll initially be prescribed a high dose of prednisolone, which will be reduced gradually over time. Most people with polymyalgia rheumatica will need to take a long-term course of corticosteroid treatment (lasting 18 months to two years) to prevent their symptoms returning. Read more about treating polymyalgia rheumatica. The most common symptom of polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) is pain and stiffness in the shoulder muscles, which develops quickly over a few days or weeks. The muscles in the neck and hips are also often affected. Both sides of the body are usually affected. The stiffness often feels worse first thing in the morning after you wake up and starts to improve after about 45 minutes as you become more active. Some people with polymyalgia rheumatica have additional symptoms, including: If you have symptoms of pain and stiffness that last longer than a week, you should make an appointment to see your GP so that the cause can be investigated. You should seek immediate medical advice if you have been diagnosed with polymyalgia rheumatica (or the condition is suspected) and you suddenly develop: These symptoms may indicate a more serious condition called giant cell arteritis (temporal arteritis). Call your GP immediately for advice if you have any of the above symptoms. If this isn’t possible, contact your local out of hours service or call the NHS 24 ‘111’ service. Diagnosing polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) can often be quite a lengthy process that involves several different tests. This is because the condition shares many symptoms with more common health conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, which need to be ruled out first.