

Lupus

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What is Lupus?

Lupus is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system turns against the parts of the body which it is designed to protect. This leads to inflammation and damage to various body tissues. Most people with lupus experience episodes called "flares". A flare is a worsening of signs and symptoms which occurs intermittently over time.

What does Lupus affect?

Lupus affects many parts of the body including the joints, kidneys, skin, blood vessels, heart, and brain. Symptoms of Lupus vary widely among patients, therefore it can be very difficult to diagnose. Some people go years without a proper diagnosis. However through research and education, misdiagnosis is becoming less common.

Who gets Lupus?

- Ninety percent of Lupus patients are women.
- Lupus is 2 to 3 times more prevalent among people of color.
- Onset usually occurs between the ages of 18 and 45.

There are several different types of Lupus

- Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is the form of the disease that is most commonly known as Lupus. This type of Lupus can affect many parts of the body. Symptoms include arthritis, rash, fever, and chest pain.
- Discoid lupus erythematosus is a chronic skin disorder. A rash appears on the face scalp or elsewhere. This rash can last for years and may recur. A small number of people with this form of Lupus develop SLE later.
- Subacute cutaneous lupus erythematosus is a form of Lupus in which non scarring skin lesions appear on the portions of the body exposed to sun.
- Drug-induced lupus is a form of lupus caused by medications. Symptoms are similar to SLA except that there is rarely kidney or brain involvement. Symptoms generally cease once the drug is stopped.
- Neonatal lupus is a rare form of lupus occurring in newborn babies. At birth these babies have rashes, low blood counts and liver problems. Usually these symptoms gradually go away. However a low number of these babies develop a serious heart condition.

Other facts about Lupus

- Lupus is not infectious, rare or cancerous.
- The cause of Lupus is unknown.
- While there are ways to treat and manage Lupus, currently there is no cure.

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Symptoms of Lupus

- Arthritis
- Unexplained fever
- Painful or swollen joint and muscle pain
- Mouth ulcers
- Red rashes, most commonly in a butterfly shape on the face
- Chest pain upon deep breathing
- Unusual loss of hair
- Pale or purple fingers or toes from cold or stress
- Sensitivity to the sun
- Swelling in legs or around eyes
- Swollen glands
- Extreme fatigue
- Anemia
- Lupus can also affect numerous organs throughout the body. This can cause major health issues and even death.

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Living with Lupus

While there is no cure, there are ways to treat and manage Lupus

- **Receive regular healthcare.** It is very important for individuals with Lupus to seek regular checkups with the doctor rather than waiting for Lupus flares. With regular treatment flares can be more manageable. There are several types of medications that can be effective in treating Lupus. These include anti-inflammatory and antimalarial drugs, as well as alternative therapies.
- **Develop a good Doctor-Patient relationship.** Such a relationship will allow you to feel comfortable discussing issues and questions regarding your health. This will help you manage Lupus better.
- **Learn the warning signs of a Lupus flare.** Being in tune with your body can help you reduce the intensity of a flare, and possibly even prevent one from occurring.
- **Reduce and manage stress.** Stress can cause fatigue, and a general lack of well being, which can lead to a flare. Managing and limiting stress are important factors in living with Lupus.
- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Meditation, yoga and deep breathing exercises are other good coping strategies.
- **Control fatigue.** Fatigue affects 90% of Lupus sufferers. Maintaining balance in your life, getting the proper amount of rest, and setting priorities for time and energy are all helpful in relieving some of this fatigue.
- **Develop and maintain a good support system.** This can help boost your self esteem as well as help improve coping skills.
- **Avoid sun exposure.** Two thirds of people with Lupus have problems with ultraviolet light. Use a minimum of SPF 15 if you will be outside longer than five minutes. Limit your time outside to earlier in the morning or later in the evening to avoid the sun at its peak.
- **Apply moist heat to joints.** Heat is helpful in alleviating joint pain. However wet heat is much more effective than dry. Take warm baths or showers.
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking can cause flares, and worsens several symptoms of Lupus.
- **Exercise.** While rest is important for individuals with Lupus, it is also very important to keep your body fit. Low impact aerobics, bicycling, swimming and walking are all good types of helpful in keeping the body fit.
- **Eat a well balanced diet.** A well balanced diet provides the necessary fuel for your body to carry out its everyday necessary functions as well as increase your feeling of well being.

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Lupus Resources

Lupus Foundation of America Inc.

<http://www.lupus.org>

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