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## **WOMEN WITH LUPUS AT RISK FOR HEART DISEASE**

**SAN FRANCISCO, Oct. 25, 2008** – Women with the autoimmune disease systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) have a more than two-fold increased risk of cardiovascular disease over women without the disease according to research funded in part by the Arthritis Foundation. The research was presented this week at the American College of Rheumatology Annual Scientific Meeting in San Francisco.

Using the Nurses' Health Study cohort, investigators from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston identified 8,169 cardiovascular events – fatal and nonfatal heart attack, stroke, coronary artery bypass surgery and angioplasty – that occurred among the 119,329 eligible women enrolled in the study. They also identified 148 women who developed SLE over the course of the 28-year study. The participants in this study were female nurses from across the U.S. and the mean age at onset of SLE was 53 years. Prior studies mainly examined rates of cardiovascular disease among younger women with more severe SLE, followed at academic medical centers.

After adjusting for confounding factors, including age, race, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, body mass index, physical exercise, smoking status and medication usage, the research team determined that women with SLE are at 2.25 times the risk for coronary heart disease and 2.29 the risk for stroke.

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Arthritis Foundation grant recipient and lead scientist on this study, Karen H. Costenbader, MD, MPH, concludes, “We have confirmed that women with lupus, regardless of their age at disease onset, need to be particularly aware of their elevated cardiovascular risk. Modification of this risk however possible, through exercise, weight control, smoking cessation and cholesterol lowering, should be sought.”

### **About the Arthritis Foundation**

The Arthritis Foundation is the leading health organization addressing the needs of some 46 million Americans living with arthritis, the nation’s most common cause of disability. Founded in 1948, with headquarters in Atlanta, the Arthritis Foundation has multiple service points located throughout the country.

The Arthritis Foundation is the largest private, not-for-profit contributor to arthritis research in the world, funding more than \$400 million in research grants since 1948. Celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, the foundation helps individuals take control of arthritis by providing public health education; pursuing public policy and legislation; and conducting evidence-based programs to improve the quality of life for those living with arthritis.

Information is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-800-283-7800 or

[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org).

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