

## About Lupus

Lupus is a chronic (long-lasting) autoimmune disease in which the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. This results in inflammation, which can affect various parts of the body including the joints, skin, heart and blood vessels, kidneys, lungs and even the brain. No one knows exactly what causes lupus. Scientists believe that genetic, environmental and hormonal factors interact to cause the disease. There are several types of lupus, but systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is the most common form and accounts for 70 percent of all lupus cases.

## Signs and Symptoms of Lupus

Lupus affects everyone differently. Some people have relatively mild symptoms, while others may have more severe and life-threatening symptoms that appear suddenly.

Common symptoms of lupus include:

- Joint pain, swelling or stiffness.
- Rash in areas exposed to the sun.
- Fatigue.
- Sensitivity to sunlight (photosensitivity).
- Mouth sores.
- Hair loss.
- Headache.

Many people with lupus also experience Raynaud's disease, which causes fingers and/or toes to turn white or blue when cold, and Sjogren's syndrome, which causes dry eyes, mouth and vagina. Some people may

## FAST FACTS

- **As many as 300,000 people in the United States have lupus.**
- **Nine out of ten adults with lupus are women diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 45.**
- **African-American women are three times more likely than white women to have lupus.**

experience shortness of breath and/or severe chest pain; change in the color of urine; frothy urine; and/or leg swelling. Tell your doctor immediately if you experience any of these symptoms, as they could indicate lung or kidney problems.

## Diagnosing Lupus

Diagnosing lupus can be difficult because symptoms come and go and often mimic those of other diseases. There is no single test to diagnose lupus, but lab tests, a family medical history and a physical exam can help with a diagnosis. You may be referred to a rheumatologist, a doctor who treats diseases of the joints, muscles, bones and some diseases of the immune system. Blood tests are used to check your liver and kidney function

## For More Information



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Lupus**

**Arthritis Foundation Helpline**

**1-800-283-7800 | [helpline@arthritis.org](mailto:helpline@arthritis.org)**

and to look for antinuclear antibodies and proteins that cause inflammation.

## Treating Lupus

The goals of lupus treatment are to:

- Stop inflammation.
- Relieve symptoms.
- Prevent flares (periods when pain, rashes and fatigue worsen).
- Prevent organ damage and long-term complications.
- Improve physical function and overall well-being.

There is no known cure for lupus, but symptoms can be managed with a combination of medications and lifestyle changes. Medicines to treat lupus have two functions: to provide pain relief and/or to slow or stop disease progression. These include antimalarials, corticosteroids, biologics and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

Advanced cases may require immunosuppressive drugs to prevent organ damage. Once treatment starts, regular doctor's visits and lab tests are needed to determine how well treatment is working and to monitor side effects.

In addition to medication, a healthy, balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean

 **SELF-MANAGEMENT IS KEY**

**Self-management means taking a proactive role in your care. Take these self-care steps:**

- Protect yourself from ultraviolet (UV) rays.
- Monitor your symptoms and closely follow your medication regimen.
- Eat healthy, anti-inflammatory foods.
- Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Stop smoking.
- Use relaxation techniques to manage stress.
- Balance rest and activity (activity pacing).
- Care for emotional health.

protein may help. Exercise is also important. However, during times when disease activity is high, it's important to rest to reduce inflammation and fatigue.

## FAQ

**Does lupus affect my chances of having children?** Lupus is often diagnosed in women during their childbearing years so pregnancy may present special challenges for women with lupus, but it is possible. However, certain lupus medications may interfere with a healthy pregnancy. That is why doctors require patients to use birth control when taking those medications. Talk to your rheumatologist about family planning, and together you can develop a treatment plan.

**Will my lupus ever go away?** As with many autoimmune diseases, symptoms of

lupus can come and go. The disease may be permanent. Some people with lupus have mild disease but may experience times when symptoms get worse for a while – called a flare – then improve or even disappear completely for a time – called remission.

**What can I do to protect myself from light sensitivity caused by lupus?** More than half of all people with lupus are photosensitive. You can protect yourself by avoiding tropical sun exposure. Use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher and wear sun-protective clothing and hats to protect yourself even when it is cloudy.