

Lupus Fact Sheet

Overview:

- Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE or lupus) is a chronic inflammatory autoimmune disorder that can attack virtually any organ of the body. In lupus, the immune system has stopped working properly—antibodies that normally protect against infection are misdirected and attack one's own healthy tissues and organs. This may cause inflammation, injury and pain. In lupus, the inflammation occurs inside the body's vital organs and systems.
- The cause of the disease is unknown. Researchers believe genetic, environmental and possibly hormonal factors combine in some way to cause the condition. You can't "catch" lupus from someone else, and it can't be sexually transmitted.
- While lupus can run in families, it most likely takes external factors to trigger the illness, such as overexposure to ultraviolet rays or certain drugs. Infections, trauma, stress, surgery or hormones may also bring about symptoms of lupus.

Prevalence:

- An estimated 1.5 million Americans have lupus, and it is more prevalent than cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, sickle-cell anemia and cystic fibrosis—combined.
- Lupus may occur in males or females at any age, but young women between the ages of 15 and 44 are most likely to develop the disease.
- Lupus is more common among African American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American women.
- Death rates from lupus are on the rise. A report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed a 60-70% upsurge in lupus deaths between 1979 and 1998. Death rates are more than five times higher for women than for men, and more than three times higher for African Americans than for Caucasians.

Symptoms:

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| ❖ Chronic joint pain, swelling, or stiffness | ❖ Unusual hair loss |
| ❖ Achy joints | ❖ Anemia |
| ❖ Unexplained fever over 100 degrees F | ❖ Abnormal blood clotting |
| ❖ Prolonged or extreme fatigue | ❖ Sensitivity to the sun |
| ❖ Skin rashes | ❖ Swollen ankles |
| ❖ Chest pain or shortness of breath | ❖ Seizures |
| ❖ Butterfly-shaped rash across the cheeks and bridge of the nose | ❖ Mouth or nose ulcers |
| | ❖ Fingers turning white and/or blue in the cold |

Diagnosis:

- Lupus is difficult to diagnose because its symptoms come and go, and mimic those of other diseases.
- A primary care doctor or rheumatologist will use the patient's medical history, a physical exam and many routine as well as special tests to rule out other diseases.

- Many physicians use the American College of Rheumatology's "Eleven Criteria of Lupus" to aid in the diagnosis.

Treatment:

- Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment can help manage the symptoms of the disease and lessen the chance of permanent damage.
- Once a diagnosis is established, patients are assessed for damage to major organs (kidneys, heart, central nervous system or lungs).
- Medications may include: NSAIDS (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs); antimalarial drugs; corticosteroids such as prednisone; and immunosuppressive agents.
- No major new treatment for lupus has been approved in 40 years, and current treatments can cause as much damage to a patient's system as the disease itself.
- While there is not yet a cure, research uncovers promising new findings each year. There is a tremendous need for increased research to discover new treatments and a cure for lupus.