

What is lupus?

Lupus (say “LOO-pus”) is an illness involving your immune system. Your body's immune system protects you from disease and infection. In most cases, the immune system does a great job of keeping you healthy and preventing infections. But if your immune system cannot do its job, the results can be serious.

Lupus is an **autoimmune disease**. This means that your immune system attacks healthy cells and tissues by mistake. This can damage many parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels, and brain.

Are there different kinds of lupus?

Yes. Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is the most common and most serious type. Erythematosus refers to the reddish color of the rashes or sores (lesions). SLE can be mild or severe, and it can affect many parts of the body.

In some people, lupus only affects their skin in the form of a rash or lesions. This type of lupus can occur on any part of the body, but usually appears where the skin is exposed to sunlight.

No two cases of lupus are exactly alike. Signs (symptoms) may come on suddenly or develop slowly. Also, symptoms change over time. Most people with lupus have mild disease with outbreaks — called flares — when signs get worse for a while, then get better or even disappear for a while.

During a flare, you feel much more tired, sick, feverish, and achy. A flare can also harm important body organs. Part of managing lupus is preventing flares. These can often follow times of physical or emotional stress. Learn to recognize the beginning signs of your flares and contact your doctor quickly.

What are the most common signs of lupus?

Feeling very tired (fatigue)	Fever	Muscle or joint pain, stiffness, and swelling.
Hair loss	Swollen glands	Sores in your mouth and nose
Fingers and/or toes that turn lighter colored or blue when exposed to cold	Pain with a deep breath	Rashes, especially on the face, that get worse in the sun

What is the treatment for lupus?

There is no cure for lupus. The goal of treatment is to control the redness and swelling (inflammation), to help make you more comfortable, and to prevent flares.

You need to take medicine every day. Your doctor will discuss what medicines are right for you. It depends on your signs and which parts of your body are affected.

People with lupus often need to see more than one doctor. You will have a regular (primary care) doctor and a rheumatologist (say "roo-muh-TOL-uh-jist"). Rheumatologists are doctors who have special training in treating autoimmune diseases like lupus.

Which other specialists you see depends on how lupus affects your body. For example, if lupus damages your kidney, you would see a nephrologist (say "ne-FRAHL-uh-jist") (kidney specialist).

Your doctor will order regular blood and urine tests to keep an eye on your lupus. The tests also will show if your body is having a reaction to your medicine. It is important to keep all doctor and lab appointments.

It is also important to find ways to cope with the stress of having lupus. Exercising and finding ways to relax may make it easier for you. A good support system –friends and family - also can help.

How did I get lupus?

No one is sure what causes lupus or autoimmune diseases. They tend to run in families.

Women are more likely than men to get lupus. For every 1 man with lupus, there are 9 women who have it. Also, women who are African-American, Hispanic-American, or Native-American have a higher chance of having some autoimmune diseases.

Lupus is NOT contagious. You can't "catch" lupus from someone or "give" lupus to someone.

What can I expect over time?

Lupus is a chronic (long-term) illness. If you're living with a long-term illness, you might feel affected not just physically, but also emotionally and socially.

Over time your symptoms should come under control. However, you can have flares.

The more you learn about your illness, the more you'll understand about your treatments, your emotions, and the best ways to create a healthy lifestyle based on your individual needs.

Questions about lupus? Contact us!

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