

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus & You

What is it?



Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) belongs to a family of diseases known as lupus. Lupus is sometimes described as “the disease of 1000 faces” because it can be very different from one person to another. Some types of lupus affect only the skin. Systemic lupus can affect the skin along with the joints and other organs. In this pamphlet, we'll refer to SLE as lupus.

Lupus is a chronic (long-term) autoimmune disease. For some reason the body's immune system is “turned on” and begins to attack its own tissues. This attack produces inflammation. The inflammation is extremely variable and can occur almost anywhere in the body.



Lupus is the disease of 1000 faces

Lupus is a very unique disease. It can affect people in many different ways. Some people with lupus only experience pain in the joints, a rash, and fatigue. Other people have more severe disease affecting their internal organs such as the kidneys, lungs, or brain. The point is lupus can affect 1000 different people in 1000 different ways. Everyone with lupus is unique in terms of how lupus affects them. When reading about lupus, be very careful, some things may never happen to you. Talk to your physician about “your” lupus and how it affects you!

What is it going to do to me?



The most common symptoms of lupus are fatigue and pain. Pain can affect the joints (with or without swelling) or it can be more widespread affecting the whole body. Other symptoms of lupus may include a skin rash, hair loss, swollen lymph nodes, sores in the mouth, and chest pain.

In some people, the immune attack can target the organs. This might include the kidneys, lungs, heart, or brain. This is less common but can be very serious. The immune system can also attack the red blood cells, white blood cells, or platelets.

Lupus is very different from one person to the next, but the disease usually shows a consistent pattern in a given person. When lupus flares it usually flares in a similar manner each time.

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RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about lupus and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

What can I do about it?



The first thing is don't panic. Take a deep breath. Remember, lupus is different for everybody. Most cases of lupus are mild. If you have lupus or think you may have it, your family doctor should refer you to an arthritis specialist called a rheumatologist.

Because lupus is such a variable disease, your treatment plan will be tailored just for you. There are effective treatments available that can help relieve the symptoms of lupus that bother you. Although they do not cure the disease, they can make living with the condition much more comfortable.

People with lupus can lead active and productive lives with the right kinds of treatment. This usually involves a combination of medicines and physical activity. There are many medications that can be used to treat lupus. Different medications might be needed to target different symptoms. Medications that treat the pain and inflammation of lupus can include prednisone, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil), immune modulators such as cyclophosphamide (Cytoxan), azathioprine (Imuran), or methotrexate, and biologic medications. Medications that treat chronic pain may also be used.

Here are some other recommendations:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your rheumatologist appointments regularly**
- **Get blood tests done as suggested by your rheumatologist**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat lupus**