

Lupus: What You Should Know

What is lupus?

Lupus is a disease of the immune system. It can affect many parts of the body. Normally, the immune system makes antibodies to protect the body against infections. In people who have lupus, the immune system becomes overactive and attacks healthy cells and tissues by mistake.

Who gets it?

Lupus can affect anyone, but it is more common in women 15 to 44 years of age.

What are the symptoms?

Not everyone who has lupus has the same symptoms. Symptoms can come and go. They can even stop completely for a while. When symptoms start or get worse, it's called a flare-up. Some common symptoms include:

- Feeling tired all the time
- Joint pain or swelling
- Rashes (often on the face)
- Fever
- Muscle pain
- Sores in the mouth

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor can decide whether a workup for lupus is needed. There is no one test to diagnose lupus. However, there are several tests that your doctor can order to see if you have lupus or another condition.

Some conditions with similar symptoms but are not lupus:

- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Fibromyalgia
- Mixed connective tissue disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Lyme disease
- Inflammatory bowel disease

How is it treated?

It depends on your symptoms. If you have joint pain, sore muscles, or a rash, your doctor may want you to take medicine like ibuprofen. Medicine that is used to treat malaria can also be helpful in treating symptoms of lupus and preventing flare-ups. Steroids are another kind of medicine that can help. Because of the risk of side effects, your doctor may want you to stop

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

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INFORMATION

From Your Family Doctor

Lupus: What You Should Know *(continued)*

taking certain medicines if your symptoms go away for a while. It is important to see your doctor regularly for check-ups.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American College of Rheumatology

<https://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Lupus>

Lupus Foundation of America

<http://www.lupus.org/>

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/lupus>

National Library of Medicine

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/lupus.html>

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