

Lupus: What You Should Know

What is lupus?

Lupus is a disease of the immune system that 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 between 15 and 44 years of age. Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American women are more likely to have lupus.

What are the symptoms?

Not everyone who has lupus has the same symptoms. Symptoms can come and go, and often stop completely for awhile. When symptoms start or get worse, it's called a flare.

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 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 (one brand: Motrin). Medicine that is used to treat malaria can also be helpful in treating symptoms of lupus and preventing flares. Steroids are another kind of medicine that can help with inflammation. Because of the risk of side effects, your doctor may want you to stop taking certain medicines if your symptoms go away for awhile. It's important to see your doctor regularly for check-ups.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American College of Rheumatology
<http://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
http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Lupus/lupus_ff.asp

National Library of Medicine
<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/lupus.html>

August 2016

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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