

Lupus fact sheet - detailed

What is lupus?

Systemic lupus erythematosus, referred to as SLE or lupus, is a chronic disease, meaning it is a long term disease that should be managed. Lupus affects the immune system and is called an autoimmune disease. The immune system's job is to fight foreign invaders, like germs and viruses. But in autoimmune diseases, the immune system is out of control and mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. Lupus can cause pain, inflammation, and tissue damage to various organs in the body. While there is no cure for lupus, medical treatments and lifestyle changes can help control it.

Who is at risk for lupus?

The cause of lupus is unknown, but many scientists believe lupus is linked to environmental, genetic, and hormonal factors. While anyone can develop lupus, women are affected more than men. Lupus is two to three times more common in African American women compared to White women. Lupus also usually begins during child bearing years (15-44).

What are the complications of lupus?

Because lupus usually begins during child bearing years (15-44), it can seriously affect young women's goals for education, career, family, and health. Lupus, especially when not treated, can lead to organ damage and reduce physical, mental, and social health.

What are the signs and symptoms of lupus?

Lupus symptoms can show up in many different ways. Sometimes they appear out of the blue, and sometimes they can linger. Each person's experience is unique, so your symptoms may not be the same as someone you know who has been diagnosed with lupus.

Below are some of the most common signs and symptoms of lupus:

- Pain or swelling in your joints that always seems to come back
- Reoccurring sores in your mouth
- Rashes on your skin
- Low-grade fevers you can't explain
- Extreme exhaustion no matter how much sleep you get

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How is lupus diagnosed?

Lupus is hard to detect because the signs and symptoms are similar to other diseases and may come and go. Lupus can often be misdiagnosed if only a single blood test is used for diagnosis. A health care provider should evaluate your symptom history, conduct a physical exam, and conduct a series of lab tests for a diagnosis. Because diagnosis can be challenging, your health care provider may refer you to a [rheumatologist](#), a doctor that specializes in autoimmune diseases.

How is lupus treated?

Lupus requires a team approach, because it can affect so many different organs. Common treatment includes immunosuppressive drugs (hydroxychloroquine) and anti-inflammatory drugs (corticosteroids). Early diagnosis and proper medical care significantly improve function and quality of life for lupus patients.

What can I do?

Getting an early diagnosis of lupus is critical to preventing long term consequences of the disease. If you've been experiencing symptoms (one or more), it's time to schedule an appointment to talk to your health care provider. If you think a friend may be experiencing symptoms of lupus, share befiercetakecontrol.org – a website that provides more information and resources to help.

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