

# The Impact of Lupus on the Body

## Central and Peripheral Nervous System

Seizures, Psychosis, Headaches, Cognitive Dysfunction (brain fog, memory problems), Neuropathies (disease involving the nerves), Depression, Low Grade Fever

## Eyes and Mucous Membranes

Ulcers in the Eyes, Nose, Mouth or Vagina  
Sjögren's Syndrome (chronic autoimmune disease affecting moisture-producing glands)

## Heart and Lungs

Pericarditis (inflammation of the sac surrounding the heart), Myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), Endocarditis (inflammation of the inner lining of the heart), Pleuritis (inflammation of the lining of the lung), Pneumonitis (inflammation of the lung tissue)

## Gastrointestinal System

Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Weight Changes

## Kidneys

Edema (fluid retention), Hypertension (high blood pressure), Proteinuria (excess protein in the urine), Cell Casts (cellular particles in the urine), Renal Failure (kidney failure)

## Musculoskeletal System

Extreme Fatigue, Arthralgia (joint pain), Myalgia (muscle pain), Arthritis (joint inflammation), Myositis (muscle inflammation)

## Reproductive System

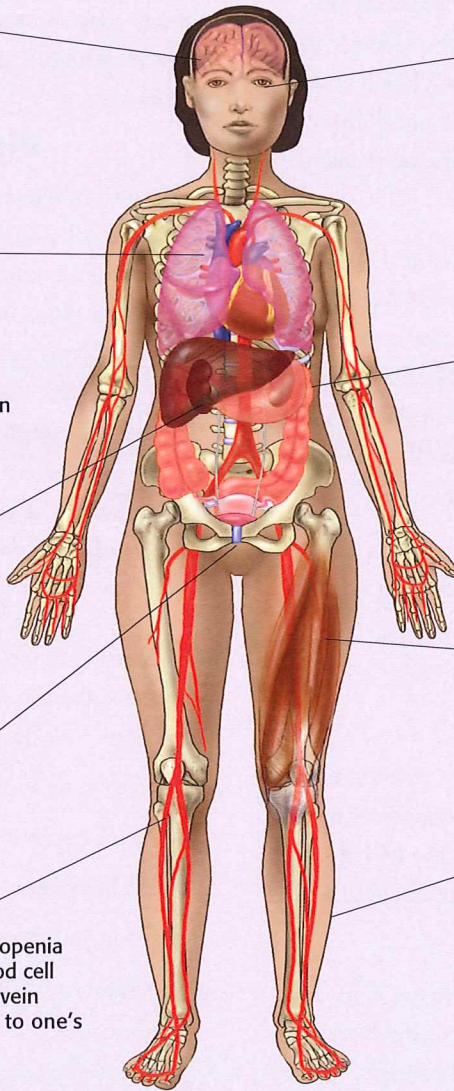
Pregnancy Complications, Miscarriages, Menstrual Cycle Irregularities

## Skin

Butterfly Rash, Cutaneous (skin) Lesions, Photosensitivity (abnormal light sensitivity), Alopecia (hair loss), Vasculitis (blood vessel inflammation), Raynaud's Phenomenon (a disorder that affects blood vessels, mostly in the fingers and toes)

## Blood

Anemia (low red blood cell counts), Thrombocytopenia (low platelet count), Leukopenia (low white blood cell count), Thrombosis (a blood clot that forms in a vein or artery), Circulating Autoantibodies (antibodies to one's own tissues and cells) and Immune Complexes (antibodies and antigens bound together)



Lupus can affect any part of the body; however, most people experience symptoms in only a few organs.

- Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease that causes inflammation in various parts of the body. The disease can range from mild to life-threatening.
- 90% of people with lupus are women and 80% of them developed lupus between ages 15 and 44.
- The causes of lupus are unknown. Scientists believe that individuals are genetically predisposed to lupus, and that environmental factors "trigger" the symptoms.
- With proper treatment, most people with lupus can live a normal lifespan.

# Facts About Lupus

**L**upus is an autoimmune disease that can affect various parts of the body. Lupus occurs most often in women between ages 15 and 44, but men, older people, and children can also develop lupus.

## TYPES OF LUPUS

- **Systemic lupus erythematosus** (SLE) causes inflammation in various parts of the body (joints; skin; kidneys; the brain; the lining of the heart, lungs, or intestines; blood vessels; and other organs or tissues). Sometimes few, if any, symptoms are evident (remission), and other times the disease is active (flare).
- **Cutaneous lupus erythematosus** (lupus in the skin) includes discoid lupus and several other types of skin lupus. Cutaneous lupus can be part of systemic lupus or it can be a condition on its own. Often, the rashes associated with lupus occur on areas of the skin exposed to sunlight or fluorescent light. Lupus rashes can be raised, scaly, and red. They are not usually itchy, but sometimes they can be painful.
- **Antiphospholipid syndrome** leads to a blood clotting disorder. Like cutaneous lupus, this condition can be seen in people with systemic lupus or it can exist on its own. This syndrome can lead to strokes, heart attacks, and miscarriages, as well as other blood clotting disorders.
- **Drug-induced lupus erythematosus** is a reaction by the immune system to certain medicines. Its symptoms are similar to systemic lupus, but it rarely affects the kidneys or the nervous system. When the medications are discontinued, the lupus-like symptoms usually go away.
- **Neonatal lupus**, though rare, affects the fetus or newborn baby of a woman with lupus. In rare cases, neonatal lupus can be very serious and may affect the baby's vital organs. It is very important to diagnose this condition as early as possible, preferably before the baby is born.

## CAUSES OF LUPUS

The causes of lupus remain unknown, but scientists believe that three factors play a role: heredity, hormones, and environmental factors. The environmental factors include ultraviolet rays from the sun (which can activate inflammatory cells in the skin) and certain medicines. Also, infections and surgery may sometimes bring about lupus, suggesting that stress to the body might play a role in triggering flares in some people.

## DIAGNOSIS OF LUPUS

Symptoms of lupus can vary from one individual to another, so treatment is based on specific findings in each person. If you think you have lupus, you should see your doctor. There is no one test for lupus, so your doctor will need to take samples of your blood for a variety of tests. Your family health history and your own health history are also important parts of a lupus diagnosis. If your doctor strongly suspects lupus, it is important for you to be referred to a specialist who has experience with this disease, such as a rheumatologist or dermatologist, depending on the type of lupus you may have.

## LIFE WITH LUPUS

People who are most successful living with lupus have learned to balance their lives while living with a chronic illness. If you have lupus, you should...

- ...listen to your body, but don't give up your goals and dreams
- ...get extra rest, but also get regular exercise when possible
- ...accept help from others, but do something proactive every day
- ...question your doctors, but don't ignore their advice
- ...be careful to follow instructions carefully when taking medications, and...
- ...closely monitor your condition with your doctor.

Although there is no cure for lupus, early diagnosis and proper medical treatment can significantly help to manage the disease. Increasing numbers of research projects on lupus are under way, to better understand lupus, to look for new and improved treatments and, one day, to find a cure.

*The Lupus Foundation of America is the only national force devoted to solving the mystery of lupus, one of the world's cruelest, most unpredictable, and devastating diseases, while giving caring support to those who suffer from its brutal impact. Through a comprehensive program of research, education, and advocacy, we lead the fight to improve the quality of life for all people affected by lupus. Contact the LEA or a chapter that serves your area to find out how you can become involved in our mission and how we can help you.*

Reviewed 12/13