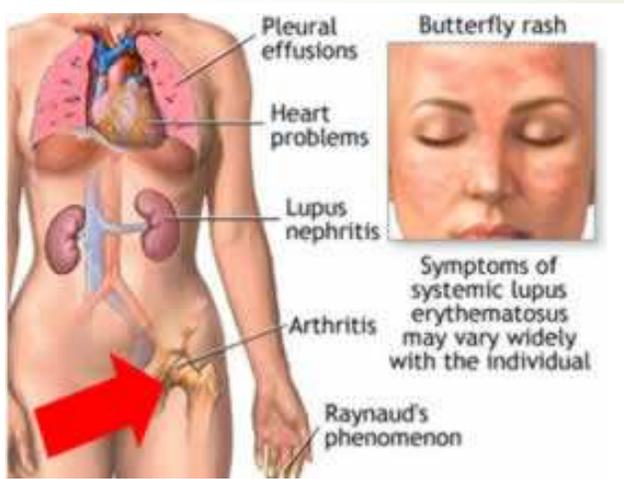
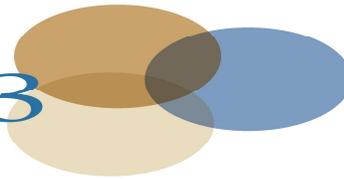


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## Lupus... A Woman's Disease?

**Lupus** is a chronic inflammatory disease that can affect various parts of the body, especially the skin, joints, heart, lungs, blood, kidneys and brain. It is an autoimmune disorder, meaning that the immune system cannot tell the difference between foreign substances and its own cells and tissues. The immune system then makes antibodies directed against itself. These antibodies, called “auto antibodies” (auto means “self”) cause inflammation, pain and damage in various parts of the body. Inflammation is considered the primary feature of lupus. Inflammation, which in Latin means “set on fire”, is characterized by pain, heat, redness, swelling and loss of function, either on the inside or outside of the body (or both).

For most people, lupus is a mild disease affecting only a few organs. For others it may cause serious and even life-threatening problems. Studies suggest that more than 16,000 Americans develop lupus each year. It is estimated that 1.5-2 million Americans have a form of lupus. More than 90 percent of people with lupus are women. Symptoms and diagnosis occur most often when women are in their child-bearing years, between the ages of 15 and 45. In the United States, lupus is more common in African Americans, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans than in Caucasians.

### Causes

The cause is currently unknown, but there are environmental and genetic factors involved. Some environmental factors which may trigger the disease include infections, antibiotics (especially those in the sulfa and penicillin groups), ultraviolet light, extreme stress, certain drugs and hormones.

Scientists believe there is genetic disposition to the disease, as lupus is known to occur in families. However, there is no known gene or genes which are thought to cause the illness. Statistics show that only about five percent of the children born to individuals with lupus will develop the illness.

Lupus is often called a “woman’s disease” despite the fact that many men are affected. Lupus can occur at any age, and in either sex, although it occurs 10-15 times more frequently among adult females than among adult males after puberty or after the emergence into sexual maturity. Hormonal factors may explain why lupus occurs more frequently in females than males. The increase of disease symptoms before menstrual periods and/or during pregnancy support the belief that hormones, particularly estrogen, may somewhat regulate the way the disease progresses. However, the exact reason for the greater prevalence of lupus in women, and cyclic increase in symptoms, is unknown.

### Diagnosis

Because many symptoms of lupus mimic those of other illnesses, lupus can be difficult to diagnose. Diagnosis is usually made by a careful review of three factors:

1. The individual’s entire medical history
2. The individual’s current symptoms
3. The analysis of some routine laboratory tests and some specialized tests related to immune status

To make a diagnosis of lupus, an individual must show evidence of abnormalities in several different organ systems. The following are typical symptoms or signs that may lead to a suspicion of lupus:

**Skin:** Butterfly rash across the cheeks, ulcers in the mouth, hair loss

**Joints:** Pain, redness, swelling

**Kidney:** Abnormal urinalysis test suggesting kidney disease

**Membrane Linings:** Inflammation of the lining of the lungs, inflammation of the lining of the heart and inflammation of the lining around the stomach will be present

**Blood:** Abnormalities will appear in the red cells, white cells and platelets

**Lungs:** Infiltrates (shadows) that come and go will be seen on x-ray

**Nervous System:** Convulsions, seizures, and nerve abnormalities that cause strange sensations or alter muscular control or strength



Although there is no one test that can definitely say whether or not a person has lupus, there are many laboratory tests that can aid the physician in making a lupus diagnosis.

The sedimentation rate (ESR) and C-Reactive Protein (CRP) are frequently elevated when a person has an inflammation from any cause. Routine blood counts may reveal anemia, low platelet and white blood counts. Routine chemistry tests may reveal elevated creatinine and blood urea nitrogen levels. Abnormal liver function may be revealed, and increased muscle enzymes (such as CPK) may alert the doctor that there is multiple organ involvement.

**Commonly used blood tests in the diagnosis of lupus are:**

ANA: Anti-nuclear antibody test

ANTI-DNA: Antibody test

ANTI-SM: Antibody test

Tests to determine the total levels of blood proteins

**Treatments**

For the vast majority of people with lupus, effective treatment can minimize symptoms, reduce inflammation and maintain normal bodily functions. Treatment approaches are based on the specific needs and symptoms of each person. Medications are often prescribed for people with lupus,

depending on which organ(s) are involved and the severity of involvement. Commonly prescribed medications include:

**Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs):** These medications are prescribed for a variety of rheumatic diseases, including lupus. Examples of such compounds include aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin), naproxen (Naprosyn), Indocin, Relafen, Tolectin and a large number of others. These drugs are usually recommended for muscle and joint pain and arthritis.

**Acetaminophen:** Tylenol is a mild analgesic that can often be used for pain. It is not nearly as effective at suppressing inflammation as aspirin.

**Corticosteroids:** Steroids are hormones that have anti-inflammatory properties. They are normally produced in small quantities by the adrenal gland. The most commonly prescribed drug of this type is Prednisone. Because steroids have a variety of side effects, the dose has to be regulated to maximize the beneficial anti-immune/anti-inflammatory.

**Antimalarials:** Aralen or Plaquenil, commonly used to treat Malaria, may also be very useful in some individuals with lupus. They are most often prescribed for skin and joint symptoms of lupus. It may take months for these drugs to demonstrate their beneficial effect.

**Immunomodulating Drugs:** Imuran and Cytoxan are in a group of agents known as cytotoxic or immunosuppressive drugs. These drugs act in a similar manner to the corticosteroids in that they suppress inflammation and tend to suppress the immune system.

**Anticoagulants:** These drugs are used to thin the blood, or in actuality to prevent blood from clotting rapidly.

Research advances are increasing the understanding of lupus and leading to improved treatment and medications.

**ConnectCare3** provides the services of a Registered Nurse whose sole responsibility is to serve as a Patient Advocate and help individuals navigate through the complex health care system during those times when they may be facing an illness, including those of a critical or life-threatening nature.

ConnectCare3 will:

- Assist you to understand your diagnosis, treatment plan and prognosis.
- Assist you to learn where the most advanced treatment centers are located.
- Assist you to access social service agencies in your community that can help you and your family at a time when they are needed most.
- Help you prepare for doctor appointments and, when appropriate, accompany you to the doctor appointments.
- Research clinical information relating to the most advanced treatment available for various illnesses.

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#### Ask the Expert

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