

The facts about Lupus

What is lupus?

Lupus is an autoimmune disease in which antibodies cause damage to tissues and organs, including arthritis and kidney failure. Lupus mainly occurs in women of childbearing age, but children, the elderly, and men can also get lupus. The cause of lupus is not known, but researchers think that genetic factors (meaning it can run in families) and environmental factors (like sunlight, infections, stress, and certain medicines) are involved.

What are the symptoms?

Lupus affects women in different ways. It can appear in many parts of the body. You may have only a few symptoms, and they may come and go.

- ▶ Rashes. They are typically red, raised, sometimes itchy or painful areas that can occur on the face (butterfly-shaped) or any other area of the body. Over two-thirds of women with lupus have rashes.
- ▶ Swollen or painful joints.
- ▶ Fatigue (being tired).
- ▶ Fever.
- ▶ Sores in your nose or mouth.
- ▶ Other common symptoms include hair loss, chest pain, and stroke.

Tips for controlling lupus:

- ▶ Eat a balanced diet. Be sure to eat lots of vegetables, fruits, and grains.
- ▶ Control your weight, and exercise at least 3 times a week.
- ▶ Try to reduce your stress.
- ▶ Stay out of the sun as much as possible. Women with lupus are often very sensitive to sunlight. It can make some symptoms of lupus worse, especially rashes. If you have to be outside, wear clothes to cover yourself, or use sunscreen with SPF of 15 or higher.
- ▶ Wash your hands often to avoid getting colds, flus, and other infections. Talk to your doctor about getting a flu shot, because women with lupus are more likely to get infections.
- ▶ If you get pregnant, tell your doctor right away. There is an increased risk of disease activity during and after pregnancy. Over half of women with lupus who get pregnant have normal pregnancies. The greatest danger of pregnancy with lupus is the increased risk of premature birth. If you do have lupus and get pregnant, your doctor will monitor you closely.

How is lupus treated?

There is no cure for lupus. But, treatment is very effective in controlling the activity and progress of the disease.

This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.

Copyright 2003

©2000, 2003 by the Women's Health Center of Excellence

For more information about women's health issues, stop by our Resource Center at 2000 West First Street, Piedmont Plaza II, 1st Floor, Winston Salem, NC 27104, visit our website at <http://www.wakehealth.edu/WHCOE/> or contact us at (336) 713-4220.