

Living Well With Lupus (cont'd)

Exercise regularly. Exercise can help to recover from a flare or even help to prevent future flares from occurring or being as severe.

Educate yourself. Write down all of the questions that you have for your doctor and ask them at your next appointment. The more you know about lupus, the more confident you'll feel in your treatment choices.

Get support. By talking about lupus with your family and friends, they can help you when you are experiencing a flare. Lupus is not only hard on you, but also your loved ones. They can't tell if you're having a good day or a bad day unless you tell them.

Have some personal time. Cope with stress in your life by taking time for yourself. Use that time to read, meditate, listen to music or write in a journal. Find calm and relaxing activities.

Talk to others who have lupus. You can connect with others who have lupus through support groups or online message boards. Other people with lupus can offer unique support because they're facing many of the same obstacles and frustrations that you're facing.

Treatment Of Lupus

While there is no cure yet, with treatment, most people with lupus can look forward to a normal life expectancy. There are many medications that can control symptoms. The treatment plan will depend in part on the type and severity of symptoms.

For The Caregiver

If you are a parent, friend or a caregiver for someone with lupus, it can be difficult to watch them go through all of these changes. Not only does it affect their lives but it also affects yours. Because lupus is the disease of 1000 faces, it can be extremely frustrating not knowing what you are dealing with. To make sure that you remain healthy yourself, take a night off, eat a balanced diet and stay active! All of these are important for everyone, not just a lupus patient.

Important Things To Note:

While lupus can be a serious condition, in most cases it can be treated and controlled;

Lupus often occurs in cycles, with periods of time in which symptoms may disappear completely;

Diagnosis and treatment are improving, allowing people with lupus to lead increasingly active and productive lives.



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What Is Lupus?

Lupus is a chronic disease characterized by inflammation in one or more parts of the body. The most common type of lupus is Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE). Systemic lupus is a complex, and sometimes baffling, condition that can target any tissue or organ in the body. This includes the skin, muscles, joints, blood vessels, lungs, heart, kidneys, and the brain.

Who Can Get Lupus?

Anyone can get lupus: women, men, and children. Between the ages of 15 and 45, nine times more women than men are diagnosed with lupus. In those under 15 or over 45, both sexes are affected equally.

Signs & Symptoms Of Lupus

General statements about symptoms of lupus can be helpful, but each person's experience will be very different.

Some people will have only a few of the many possible symptoms. Because it can target any of the body's tissues, lupus is often hard to pin down or diagnose.

Before symptoms specific to lupus occur, flu-like symptoms may appear, along with severe fatigue, a sudden unexplained loss or gain in weight, headaches, hair loss, hives, high blood pressure, or changes in the colour of fingers in the cold.

Any of the following may indicate that lupus is present. A person with lupus may experience:

- Joint pain, sometimes with swelling, redness and heat
- A red rash across upper cheeks and bridge of nose
- Extreme fatigue
- An unusual reaction to sunlight
- A red, scaly rash
- Small, usually painless sores inside the nose or mouth
- Chest pain, worse when lying down or inhaling
- Swelling of feet and legs, weight gain
- Seizures or severe psychological symptoms
- Abnormalities in blood chemistry which show up in blood tests

This is far from a complete list of symptoms, and the diagnosis of lupus must be made by a doctor.

Living Well With Lupus

One thing that makes a significant difference in living with lupus is the person's role in controlling the disease. We can deal better with the challenge of living with this condition by learning all we can about it and by being aware of how our own body reacts.

Sometimes, flares follow a clear pattern, with the same combination of symptoms every time. An informed person can watch for warning signs and alert their doctor early on. While false alarms happen, catching a flare in its early stages can make treatment easier and more effective.

With this information as a basis, a good working relationship with your doctor is crucial to the success of your treatment. The strong support of family and friends can be equally important.

By simply changing some minor details and living a healthier lifestyle, lupus flares can be better coped with should signs and symptoms occur.

Get enough sleep. Lupus patients often experience fatigue that is not usually relieved by rest. To help cope with this, get plenty of sleep at night or have a nap when needed throughout the day.

Be sun smart. Because ultraviolet light can trigger a flare, wear protective clothing, such as a hat, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 55 when you go out.

No smoking. Smoking can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease and can worsen the effects of lupus on your heart and blood vessels.

Eat a healthy balanced diet. This can benefit you in all aspects of your health. Some dietary restrictions may occur due to allergies, high blood pressure or if you are at risk for kidney damage or gastrointestinal problems.

Coping mechanisms and support. During the beginning stages of your diagnosis and throughout your life, you may have an array of feelings about your condition ranging from fear to frustration. It can increase your risk of depression and related mental health problems. It is always good to have coping mechanisms and a good support system to help deal with these issues.