



Understanding Lupus

If you've been diagnosed with lupus, you probably have a lot of questions about the disease and how it may affect your life. Lupus affects different people in different ways. For some, lupus can be mild — for others, it can be life-threatening.

Right now, there's no cure for lupus. The good news is that with the support of your doctors and loved ones, you can learn to manage it. Learning as much as you can about lupus is an important first step.

What is lupus?

Lupus is a chronic (long-term) disease that can cause inflammation (swelling) and pain in any part of your body. It's an autoimmune disease, meaning that your immune system attacks healthy tissue (tissue is what our organs are made of). Lupus most commonly affects the skin, joints, and internal organs — like your kidneys or lungs.

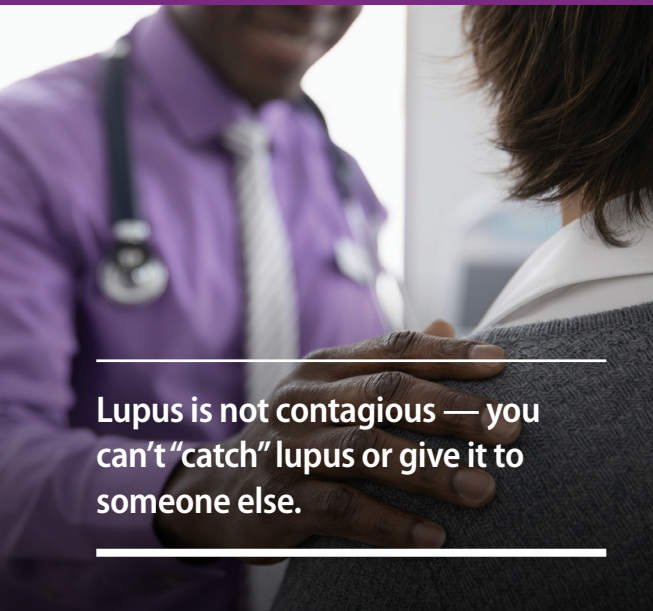
The immune system is the part of the body that fights off bacteria and viruses to help you stay healthy.

Who is at risk for developing lupus?

In the United States, at least 1.5 million people have lupus — and about 16,000 new cases of lupus are reported each year. People of all ages, genders, and racial or ethnic groups can develop lupus. But certain people are at higher risk than others, including:

- Women ages 15 to 44
- Certain racial or ethnic groups — including people who are African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, or Pacific Islander
- People who have a family member with lupus or another autoimmune disease

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Lupus is not contagious — you can't "catch" lupus or give it to someone else.

What causes lupus?

No one knows what causes lupus. Lupus and other autoimmune diseases do run in families. Experts also think it may develop in response to certain hormones (including estrogen) or environmental triggers. An environmental trigger is something outside the body that can bring on symptoms of lupus — or make them worse.

Some common triggers of lupus symptoms include:

- ✔ Ultraviolet rays from the sun or fluorescent lights
- ✔ Certain antibiotic drugs
- ✔ Having an infection
- ✔ Exhaustion (feeling very tired)
- ✔ Stress to the body, like getting hurt or having surgery
- ✔ Emotional stress, like being very busy or having problems at home

What are the symptoms of lupus?

Because lupus can affect so many different parts of the body, it can cause a lot of different symptoms. Keep in mind that these symptoms may come and go.

Symptoms of lupus may include:

- Fatigue (feeling tired often)
- Painful or swollen joints
- Swelling in the hands, feet, or around the eyes
- Headaches
- Low-grade fevers
- Sensitivity to sunlight or fluorescent light
- Chest pain when breathing deeply

People with lupus may also have problems with the skin and hair, including:

- A butterfly-shaped rash on the cheeks and nose
- Hair loss
- Sores in the mouth or nose

Lupus may also cause problems with the blood and blood vessels, like:

- Blood clots
- Low numbers of red blood cells (anemia)
- Fingers and toes turning white or blue and feeling numb when a person is cold or stressed (Raynaud's phenomenon)

What kinds of doctors treat lupus?

Most people who have lupus will see a **rheumatologist**. Rheumatologists are specialists who diagnose and treat diseases in the joints or muscles. But because lupus can cause problems anywhere in the body, you may have other types of doctors on your treatment team — for example, a:

- **Dermatologist** (for your skin)
- **Nephrologist** (for your kidneys)
- **Cardiologist** (for your heart)

Other types of lupus

When people talk about lupus, they're usually talking about systemic lupus. But there are other types — including **cutaneous lupus**, **drug-induced lupus**, and **neonatal lupus**. To learn more, check out this resource:

Resources.Lupus.org/Entry/Types-of-Lupus

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For more information about lupus, please visit
the **National Resource Center on Lupus** at:

Resources.Lupus.org