

What is Lupus all about?

Lupus is an autoimmune disease that comes in several different forms. It can appear in a variety of ways, some of which aren't too severe, other forms can be quite severe, even life-threatening to lethal, but what is it?

Lupus is generally the term used to refer to "Systemic Lupus Erythematosus", systemic means that it can involve the entire body. It's an autoimmune disease: this means that the body's immune system gets mixed up and starts perceiving that parts of "you" are not "really you" and are foreign and must be eliminated if you are to survive, your immune system then mounts an attack just as it would against an infection or foreign invader. Unfortunately it's fighting "you", sometimes to the death. The exact type of symptoms will depend on the organ system(s) involved.

The name Lupus refers to "wolf", the initial malar rash along the sides of the nose is a butterfly rash that can leave the patient looking somewhat wolf-like (at least in the eyes of the first doctor in 19th century France who described it). Systemic Lupus is the most serious form, there are other less mild forms.

Discoid lupus is a skin disease that is inflammation limited to parts of the skin. It appears as a rash on the face, neck, scalp, ears, it can cause scarring but usually is not more severe than that. Frequently it can be treated with topical local cortisone creams & ointments.

Drug-Induced Lupus can be induced from a variety of drugs such as anti-epilepsy medicines, acne medications and others. Generally the symptoms are self-limited; they go away when you stop the medicine causing the reaction.

What causes lupus?

Since nobody knows the exact mechanism of what makes the body develop lupus, it's hard to answer this question. There are certain conditions that are linked with a flare of lupus symptoms however:

About 10 women get lupus for every man who suffers from it, Estrogen may be a factor in it's development, the women who get it are almost always of child-bearing age.

Lupus is more common in blacks, Asians, Latin's and native Americans than in non-Hispanic white women.

There's a family history of lupus in about 10% of those who suffer from it.

Major stress/infection can trigger a flare of lupus symptoms. It doesn't appear to be contagious but there are some schools of thought that there may be an infectious etiology behind it, possibly cell-wall deficient bacteria.

How do we diagnose lupus?

It can be hard to diagnose due to the many ways it can appear and organ systems it can affect. Profound fatigue is very common, some folks with it will sleep more than 14 hours daily and still feel exhausted—it uses up a lot of energy with the constant turmoil of the immune system fighting the body causing profound fatigue.

The malar rash on the sides of the nose is one of the key characteristics, it often has a butterfly shape and is worse after sun exposure—photosensitivity is also common with Lupus.

Ulcers may appear in the mouth and nose.

Arthritis; joint pain, ache, stiffness is more common in the hands and feet, often symmetrical—the same joint in one extremity as the other hurts, often worse in the morning is another common manifestation of it.

Muscle aches can also appear with loss of appetite, swollen glands and hair loss.

There may be skin rashes, abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting can also occur.

Serositis is collection of fluids around the heart, lungs or in the abdomen, often there is pain in those areas where the fluid collects due to the inflammation of the linings of those body cavities affected.

Kidney problems can be mild to severe—enough to require dialysis machines as an artificial kidney, about half of these patients will have severe problems.

Neurological problems including seizures, emotional problems, memory loss, unusual pains and sensations, weakness can occur.

Anemia and low white blood cell counts which can cause weakness and a tendency toward infections respectively. Low platelet counts can cause easy bleeding.

Immune system problems can be reflected in the blood tests used to diagnose the condition such as a positive ANA test that is positive in about 95% or more of patients with this syndrome.

Having 4 or more of the signs and symptoms mentioned above makes it very likely that lupus is the cause of a patient's problem. Thankfully most patients don't have ALL of these symptoms which would cause horrible suffering!

How is it treated?

Initial mild aches and pains may respond to Tylenol and Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory (NSAID) drugs such as Ibuprofen or Naproxen. Ant-malaria drugs can be helpful in modulating the immune system can actually be helpful.

Cortisone is one of the main drugs used to treat this illness/spectrum of illnesses; it can be life-saving for acute flares of the disease but can't be used long-term without the risk of many problems including cataracts, osteoporosis, GI bleeding, weight gain, bloating, emotional problems and a variety of other issues to be dealt with.

There are some amazing new drugs that help control the immune system and fight this disease at its source; the immune system. Obviously, any time we start trying to control the immune system we potentially increase a patient's risk of severe life-threatening infections and other problems.

Lupus can prevent with flares, or exacerbations when it gets worse, then it can ease off and go into remission. Flares can be triggered by the things mentioned above and usually cause increase fatigue/aches and other symptoms depending on the organ system involved. A healthy lifestyle and adequate rest can be crucial to preventing lupus flares avoid smoking, drinking, drugs, excessive fatigue and lifestyle, also things such as tattooing and body piercing which increase risk of infection should be avoided.

Avoiding extra estrogen as in the birth control pills can also be a good idea.

There is a new wind blowing in the medical realm that has to do with the thought that there is a form of infection involved in Lupus, getting it reined in can be the secret to good health, more information is available on this at www.marshallprotocol.com