

What Is Lupus?

A better understanding of lupus begins with taking a closer look at this unpredictable disease.

“

My wife was just diagnosed with lupus. I have no idea what that means or if there’s anything I can do to help her—but I know I want to try.

”

Defining lupus

Lupus is a chronic disease that involves your immune system and can damage any part of the body. Your immune system is like a bodyguard against invaders, such as viruses, bacteria, and other germs. Normally, a part of your immune system works to fight off these invaders by making antibodies.

But in the case of lupus, the immune system can’t tell the difference between the invaders and your body’s own healthy tissue. It creates autoantibodies that attack and destroy the healthy tissue, causing inflammation throughout various parts of the body. Over time, this inflammation may damage the organs of the body.

9 out of 10

adults with lupus are women

Who is affected by lupus?

Over 5 million people around the world have some form of lupus. While anyone can suffer from lupus:

Women ages 15–44 are most likely to develop lupus. In fact, lupus occurs 9 out of 10 times more often in women than in men.

Women of color, including African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latina, Native American, and Pacific Islander women, are also more likely to develop lupus compared with Caucasian women.

People who have a family member with lupus or another autoimmune disease may be at higher risk for lupus.

What causes lupus?

First, it’s important to know that lupus is not contagious, not even through sexual contact. You can’t catch lupus and you can’t give it to someone else.

No one understands yet what causes lupus. Scientists believe that it comes from a combination of things:

Hormones

Because lupus affects more women than men, hormones (in particular, estrogen) might play a role.

Genetics

A family history of lupus may make someone more likely to develop the disease.

Environment

There may be a link between lupus and certain environmental factors, such as stress, viruses, and certain medicines.

1.5 million

1.5 million Americans have a form of lupus (systemic lupus erythematosus, cutaneous lupus, drug-induce lupus, or neonatal lupus).

Slow the progress of lupus

An early diagnosis of lupus means starting treatment and understanding your triggers sooner rather than later. Treatment strategies can help control symptoms that may contribute to long-term damage.

If you think you may have lupus, but you haven’t yet been diagnosed, talk to a doctor as soon as possible. They may want to perform blood tests, urine tests, or biopsies. They will also want to hear as many details as you can share about your symptoms. For help with tracking your symptoms, [click here](#).

After a diagnosis, a rheumatologist can help you manage lupus with medicines and lifestyle changes, such as [using sun protection](#). While there is no cure, you and your doctors can create a treatment plan to help manage the disease.

2–3 times

more prevalent among women of color

Get help tracking lupus symptoms.

Simply share your email address and we’ll send you free tools and resources to help you identify, track, and better understand your symptoms—so you can begin to feel more confident about managing your lupus.

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