

# Chances are,

if you are reading this, that you or someone you love has been diagnosed with lupus.

Lupus is a chronic, autoimmune disease that can damage any part of the body (skin, joints, and/or organs inside the body). "Autoimmune" means your body's own immune system attacks you and damages your body by mistake. There is no cure for lupus and it can be fatal. No one knows what causes lupus. While lupus is not well known or understood, it is far more common than better known diseases such as leukemia, muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis and multiple sclerosis.

The Lupus Foundation of America estimates that 1.5 million Americans, and at least five million people worldwide, have a form of lupus. Lupus affects mostly women in their child bearing years, but anyone can be affected by it.

The Local Lupus Alliance exists in the Coulee Region to connect those suffering from lupus to each other and to other resources. Patients and supporters can ask questions, share their struggles, celebrate victories, and support one another, all while finding a way to cope with this illness.

*The mission of the Local Lupus Alliance is to raise awareness, educate and assist patients and others who have been adversely affected by Lupus within our community and surrounding areas, grow partnerships and collaborate to bring about compassionate care and healing.*

[www.locallupus.org](http://www.locallupus.org)



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"But you don't look sick..."

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# LUPUS

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# HOW LUPUS AFFECTS YOUR BODY

## BRAIN

Restricted blood flow in the brain can cause dizziness, headaches, mood swings, and concentration problems. In rare cases, it can lead to seizures. Lupus is known to cause depression and can cause neurological issues.

When inflammation occurs in and around the joints, it results in pain, stiffness, swelling, and limited range of motion. Chronic inflammation in the joints can wear down bone and destroy cartilage.

Inflammation can cause muscle aches and pains. At times, muscles can appear red and swollen and feel warm to the touch. Muscle inflammation due to lupus doesn't usually result in permanently weakened muscles. Over-the-counter medications, heating pads, cold packs, or warm showers and baths can help reduce symptoms.

## SKELETAL and MUSCULAR

## REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Women with lupus are advised not to use intrauterine devices due to increased risk of infection. Some women are unable to tolerate birth control pills. Having lupus can complicate a woman's childbearing years. Women with lupus may have difficulty conceiving and are at higher risk for miscarriage, especially early or late term. Careful monitoring can help reduce the risk. Flare-ups of lupus are more likely to occur during pregnancy, and so are hypertension, kidney problems, and diabetes. The good news is that with proper medical care, most women with lupus can have healthy babies.

The excretory system helps eliminate toxins from the body. The kidneys may become inflamed, but symptoms aren't always obvious. Problems with the kidneys are usually detected with a blood test.

Inflammation can cause the liver to become enlarged. People with lupus are prone to jaundice, which can cause yellowing of the skin and eyes, and autoimmune hepatitis, which can scar the liver.

Lupus patients who develop secondary Sjogren's syndrome have decreased tear secretion, resulting in very dry eyes. This can cause burning, itching, sensitivity to light, and blurry vision. Chronic dry eyes can lead to scarring or ulceration of the cornea.

## EXCRETORY SYSTEM

The immune system exists to ward off attacks from foreign invaders like bacteria and viruses. In people with an autoimmune disease, the system mistakenly launches a sustained attack on healthy tissue in the body. In the case of lupus, attacks cause inflammation that can occur almost anywhere. The most common areas are the skin and joints. General symptoms include fatigue, fever with no known cause, and swollen glands.

Researchers don't know exactly what triggers lupus, and there is no cure. Treatment focuses on symptom management and preventing damage to major organs.

## IMMUNE SYSTEM

No 2 cases of Lupus are the same. It takes an average of 4 years and 3 doctors to get diagnosed.

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## HEART

The circulatory system is responsible for circulating blood through the body. Lupus can lower the body's ability to make red blood cells, resulting in anemia. Lupus can also cause inflammation of the

heart or blood vessels, which can interfere with blood flow. This can lead to heart attack, infection, and tissue death. The Lupus Foundation of America cites heart disease (coronary artery disease) as the leading cause of death for people with lupus.

Pericarditis is a condition in which the sac that surrounds the heart (pericardium) becomes inflamed. Chronic pericarditis can scar heart tissue and affect the heart's ability to

pump blood effectively. Inflammation of the heart muscle (myocardium) can cause an irregular heartbeat.

Lupus also can cause a thickening of the surfaces of the heart valve (endocarditis). This increases risk for infection and formation of clots. People with lupus are at increased risk of atherosclerosis caused by plaque, which narrows blood vessels and hinders blood flow.

Corticosteroids, which are used to treat lupus, may increase risk of hypertension, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

## SKIN & HAIR

The hallmark sign of lupus is a butterfly-shaped rash that often appears over the bridge of the nose and extends to the cheeks. A rash also may occur on the neck or chest, and the skin may appear scaly. People with lupus tend to be sensitive to sunlight and prone to sunburns after only brief exposure to sun. In some cases, skin ulcers may form on the inside of the nose, mouth, or tongue. Some people with lupus develop Raynaud's phenomenon, a condition in which the skin of the ears, nose, fingers, and toes turn numb and pale or purple when exposed to cold. Lupus may cause hair to break easily. Inflammation of the skin is often an early sign of lupus that usually results in thinning of the hair and loss of eyelashes, eyebrows, facial hair, and body hair. Hair may grow back with treatment. However, permanent hair loss occurs when lesions form on the scalp.

It can hurt to breathe when the lungs or the linings of the chest cavity become inflamed. It also may cause shortness of breath and chest pain. Inflammation of lungs increases risk of pneumonia.

## RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

Lupus can affect the entire digestive system, beginning with the mouth. People with lupus are prone to lesions on the inside of the cheeks, the lower lip, or the roof of the mouth. Certain medications prescribed to treat lupus can increase your risk for oral lesions.

Some people with lupus develop secondary Sjogren's syndrome, an autoimmune disease that attacks glands in the mouth and eyes, causing dryness. Lack of saliva encourages dental cavities and gum disease.

When the esophagus is inflamed, stomach acid can be forced back into the esophagus (acid reflux), causing heartburn and gas. It can also make swallowing difficult (dysphagia).

Some people with lupus take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). This can increase risk of bleeding ulcers in the stomach lining or where the stomach meets the bile duct, pancreatic duct, and small intestine (duodenum). *Helicobacter pylori* bacterium also can cause ulcers, a common problem for people with lupus.

Inflammation can cause fluids to build up in the lining on the inside of the abdomen (peritoneum). Symptoms include abdominal pain, nausea, fever, and constipation. Lupus patients are at increased risk for inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis). Use of diuretics, immunosuppressants, or corticosteroids increases this risk.

Digestive symptoms include constipation, diarrhea, and nausea. These problems can be aggravated by the use of corticosteroids or NSAIDs. Ulcers that form in the colon and rectum may cause bloody diarrhea.

## DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

Illustration done by a family member of a Lupus patient.

If you are a patient with Lupus or are caring for someone with lupus and are looking for information, email us at [info@locallupus.org](mailto:info@locallupus.org) Visit us @ [www.locallupus.org](http://www.locallupus.org)

