Lupus

What Is Lupus?

Lupus is an autoimmune disease that happens when the body attacks its own tissues and organs by mistake. This can cause rashes and pain and swelling in the joints, kidneys, and other organs. The cause for lupus is not clear. It usually starts when people are in their 20s and 30s and occurs more often in women than in men.

What Are the Warning Signs of Lupus?

Symptoms can come and go. When you are having symptoms, it is called a lupus "flare." The symptoms can be mild or serious. They may include:

- Feeling tired
- Rashes, particularly a butterfly-shaped rash over the cheeks or a red rash with raised round or oval patches
- Painful and swollen joints
- Sores in the mouth or nose
- Chest pain when breathing deeply
- Feeling depressed or confused, sometimes called "lupus fog"
- Fever
- Fingers or toes that turn white or blue when cold, called Raynaud's phenomenon

How Is Lupus Diagnosed?

Lupus can be hard to diagnose because the symptoms often come and go. Symptoms for lupus may also be similar to those of other medical conditions. There is no one test to diagnose lupus, so you may need a combination of tests.

- Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history and give a physical exam.
- Blood tests can help confirm whether you have lupus.
- If your doctor thinks lupus could be affecting your lungs or heart, you may have X-rays of your chest or a test that records the electrical activity and rhythm of the heart, called an ECG.

How Is Lupus Treated?

Treatment depends on what your symptoms are and may include:

- Medicines to reduce swelling and pain, like steroids or ibuprofen.
- Other medicines to help control the symptoms of a flare.

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Questions for My Doctor

- What can cause lupus symptoms to flare?
- What is the best treatment for me?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- What are the risks and side effects of medicines for lupus?
- Will lupus ever go away?
- Does lupus put me at risk for any other conditions?

Bottom Line

- Lupus is an autoimmune disease that occurs when the body wrongly attacks its own tissues.
- Symptoms can come and go. They may include rashes, painful joints, fatigue, and confusion.
- It can be difficult to diagnose lupus because symptoms are similar to those of other conditions, and these symptoms come and go. Blood tests can help confirm if you have the disease.
- Treatment is based on your symptoms and how severe the disease is. Treatment can include medicines to manage pain and other symptoms.

For More Information

- **MedlinePlus** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/lupus.html
- **National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases:** www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Lupus/lupus_ff.asp
- **American College of Rheumatology:** http://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Lupus
- **Lupus Foundation of America:** www.lupus.org

Notes:

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