

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Living and coping with a chronic condition can be difficult. At times you may feel angry, depressed and isolated. It is not easy to accept the loss of good health or accept constant pain and changes in your physical appearance.

Talking about how you feel with someone who is close to you is very important. But sometimes you may feel the need to confide in someone who really understands. Arthritis New Zealand employs skilled Arthritis Educators, who are always on hand. They can give you information and advice, put you in touch with support and exercise groups throughout the country and help you obtain special equipment and aids for daily living.

LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS

A variety of known techniques can help people control and reduce the effects of arthritis. Research has shown that people who exercise regularly, practise relaxation and/or use other self-management techniques have less pain and are more active than those people who are not self-managers.

Self-management courses are available through Arthritis New Zealand. They are designed to give people the skills needed to take a more active part in their arthritis care, together with a healthcare team. Medication, physical activity, joint protection, stress management, acupuncture, heat/cold therapy and weight control to prevent extra stress on weight bearing joints, are just some of the components of self management.

ARTHRITIS NEW ZEALAND

Arthritis New Zealand is a not-for-profit organisation whose main aim is to enable a better quality of life for people affected by arthritis. Arthritis New Zealand works in the areas of education, public awareness, direct support, lobbying and funding research.

There are local Service Centres and 32 Arthritis Educators, who offer education, advice, information and guidance on services and special equipment. Arthritis Educators run highly regarded self management courses.

For more information look in the telephone directory for local contacts or contact:

ARTHRITIS NEW ZEALAND

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LUPUS



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KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA
Te whakapiki i te kounga ora

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WHAT IS LUPUS?

Lupus is a form of arthritis which can affect joints, muscles and other parts of the body. It is one of the autoimmune rheumatic diseases. In people with autoimmune diseases, antibodies are produced which act against certain body tissues and cause inflammation.

There are two main forms of Lupus: Discoid Lupus which affects only the skin, and Systemic Lupus, which involves the joints and sometimes internal organs as well.

Lupus (Latin for wolf) takes its name from the fact that it can cause serious rashes across the cheeks and nose (rather fancifully resembling the face of the wolf).



WHAT CAUSES LUPUS?

It has been suggested that genetic factors (which people are born with), play an important role in the development of the condition. This does not rule out a role for environmental factors, which may also be shared by people from particular backgrounds. There is no single gene which puts people at risk of developing Lupus. It seems most likely that between 20 and 80 genes contribute to the risk and while the genes may set the scene environmental factors contribute to whether or not the disease develops, and when. The 'environmental' factors include exposure to UV light (sun-exposure), various infections, possibly chemicals in the environment, factors related to stress (not well-identified) and female hormonal activity (for example the oestrogen-containing contraceptive pill or pregnancy). These factors combine together to influence the immune system in such a way that immune abnormalities result which cause the disease to develop (or recur).

WHO GETS LUPUS?

About ten times as many women as men develop Lupus and it is usually diagnosed in the child-bearing years. In New Zealand it is 3-4 times more common in Maori and Pacific Island peoples.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Lupus can mimic many different conditions. It usually starts with joint pains, especially in the small joints of the hands and feet, and may 'flit' from one set of joints to another quite quickly. Fatigue is one of the most common and certainly one of the most prominent features of lupus. Patients often describe it as an unnatural fatigue. Its causes are not well understood.

Other symptoms may include:

- Skin rashes
- Recurring mouth ulcers
- Fevers
- Rashes
- Hair loss
- Headaches
- Depression

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Diagnosis is usually made on clinical grounds. The combination of some of the features described above, especially the skin rashes, usually but not always, make the diagnosis clear.

Unfortunately, in many patients, especially those who do not have the classical tell-tale rashes, the diagnosis can be missed. This is particularly true for those with more 'vague' symptoms

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such as fatigue, depression or headaches. Lupus is now almost invariably diagnosed by specific blood tests. These invoke a small amount of blood and are extremely sensitive.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Although there is no cure for Lupus, for the vast majority of people effective treatment can minimise symptoms, reduce inflammation, and maintain normal bodily functions.

Medications

Medications are often prescribed, depending on which organ(s) are involved, and the severity of involvement. Commonly prescribed medications include those for pain, inflammation, skin and joint symptoms and immune system suppressants.

Lifestyle Changes

Lifestyle changes can help minimise symptoms and aid an improved sense of well-being. Preventive measures can reduce the risk of flares. For photosensitive patients, avoidance of (excessive) sun exposure and/or the regular application of sunscreens will usually prevent rashes. Regular exercise can help prevent muscle weakness and fatigue. Immunisation will protect against specific infections and maintaining a healthy lifestyle by getting enough rest, reducing stress, eating a balanced diet, and quitting smoking all helps.