

What Is Lupus? (SLE)



Lupus, also called systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), is a chronic inflammatory disease that occurs when your body's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs. Inflammation affects the joints and skin and can damage the kidneys, brain, blood, heart and lungs. Lupus can be difficult to diagnose because its signs and symptoms mimic those of other conditions. The most distinctive sign of lupus – a facial rash that looks like the wings of a butterfly unfolding across both cheeks – occurs in many but not all cases of lupus.

Who Gets Lupus?

- The causes are not clear but it affects more women than men.
- Genetic factors and female hormones may play a part.
- Possible environmental triggers include infections, exposure to the sun, and stress.
- About ten times more women than men get lupus, and it is usually first diagnosed in the child-bearing years.
- Lupus is three to four times more common in Māori and Pacific women and also more common in Asian women.
- It usually starts between the ages of 15 and 45.



What Are The Symptoms?

The most common symptoms:

- fatigue
- joint pain and swelling, especially in the hands and feet
- skin rashes
- sores in the mouth or nose
- anaemia (low number of red blood cells)



How Is Lupus Diagnosed?

There is no single test for lupus.

Diagnosis will involve:

- Medical History
- Physical examination
- Tests could include-bloods, X rays, breathing and heart checks, skin biopsy



Medical Management:

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), steroids, biologics and skin preparations.

How Can I Help Myself?

Changes to your lifestyle can help minimise symptoms, reduce the likelihood of flares and improve your sense of wellbeing. Suggestions include:

- quit smoking
- protect yourself from the sun – use sunscreens to prevent skin rashes
- exercise regularly to prevent muscle weakness and fatigue
- rest and relaxation
- reduce stress
- eat a healthy, balanced diet
- seek support from family, friends, medical professionals, and support groups



For more information:



Arthritis NZ
Mateponapona
Aotearoa

Phone: 0800 663 463 / Email: info@arthritis.org.nz