



Patient Information Sheet: Lupus

What is lupus?

- Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is the most common and serious type of lupus. The other kinds of lupus are discoid lupus erythematosus and subacute cutaneous lupus. With these types of lupus, skin rashes and sun sensitivity are the main symptoms.
- With lupus your immune system, which protects your body from germs, viruses and bacteria, stops working properly. When this happens, parts of your body are attacked by your own immune system and this may cause inflammation.

How common is lupus?

- Lupus affects approximately 15,000 Canadians (one in 2,000 adults).
- Lupus can affect men, women and children but it occurs most often in women of childbearing age.

What causes lupus?

- The cause of lupus is unknown.
- There may be a hereditary factor.
- There may be a link between lupus and hormones, as it tends to affect women during their childbearing years.

How do you know if you have lupus?

- A diagnosis can usually be made if you have four of the main features including the presence of abnormal antibodies, which are detected by a blood test.
- The main features include:
 - A red rash across your cheeks and nose
 - Extreme sensitivity to sunlight

- Small, often painless, sores in your mouth or nose
- Pain in the joints of your hands, arms, shoulders, feet, knees, hips or jaw. This pain may move from joint to joint and there may also be redness, heat and swelling.
- Chest pain when lying down or taking deep breaths
- Weight gain or swelling of your feet and legs
- Seizures or acute disturbance in mental functioning
- Lower than normal amounts of red and white blood cells, or platelets.

How is lupus treated?

- The goal of treatment is to control the symptoms and disease.
- Treatment is based on your own specific needs.
- Steps must be taken to avoid flares of the disease.
- Exposure to sun, tiredness and stress can all contribute to lupus flares.

Commonly prescribed medicines include:

Medication

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to lessen the effects of inflammation NSAIDs may increase your risk of stomach upset and bleeding in the gut. Let your doctor know if you experience stomach pain, indigestion or black stools.
- Other prescribed medications are the recently approved cyclooxygenase-2 inhibitors (COX-2) class of medications. Like other NSAIDS, cyclooxygenase-2 selective inhibitors (COXIBs) have similar effectiveness to older NSAIDs in reducing pain and swelling. COXIBs do not prevent joint damage. They may be used if you are at risk of stomach upset or other gastrointestinal (GI) risk factors.
- Corticosteroids to reduce inflammation and control your immune system.

- Antimalarials for managing fatigue, skin rashes and joint pain.
- Cytotoxic or immunosuppressive drugs to control inflammation and your abnormal immune system.

For medications prescribed by your doctor, it is important to know:

Name(s) (generic and brand):

How much to take:

When to take it:

How quickly will it work:

For how long should it be taken:

Side effects to look out for:

Relaxation

- Relaxing the muscles reduces joint pain.
- Relaxation can include deep breathing exercises, listening to music, visualization, prayer, meditation or listening to relaxation tapes.

For more information...

This fact sheet is just a brief look at lupus. For more information or if you have any questions, ask your doctor or call The Arthritis Society at 1-800-321-1433. You can also visit The Arthritis Society's website at www.arthritis.ca.

Questions to ask your doctor at your next visit:

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