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# Lupus

**Also called:** Discoid lupus, SLE, Subacute cutaneous lupus, Systemic lupus erythematosus

## What is lupus?

Lupus is a chronic (long-lasting) type of autoimmune disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/autoimmunediseases.html>]. Autoimmune diseases happen when your immune system [<https://medlineplus.gov/immunesystemanddisorders.html>] attacks healthy cells and tissues by mistake. This attack causes inflammation. It can also damage many parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, and brain.

There are several types of lupus:

- **Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)** is the most common type. It can be mild or severe and can affect many parts of the body.
- **Cutaneous lupus** affects the skin. It causes a rash or sores, usually after your skin is **exposed to sunlight** [<https://medlineplus.gov/sunexposure.html>]. The two major types of cutaneous lupus are discoid lupus and subacute cutaneous lupus.
- **Drug-induced lupus** is caused by a reaction to some medicines. The symptoms may start 3 to 6 months after starting the medicine. The symptoms usually go away when you stop taking the medicine.
- **Neonatal lupus**, which is rare, affects newborns. It is caused by certain antibodies that are passed from the pregnant parent to the baby.

## What causes lupus?

The cause of lupus is unknown. Researchers are studying what might cause or trigger the disease, such as:

- Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/systemic-lupus-erythematosus>]
- Environmental factors, such as viral infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/viralinfections.html>], sunlight, certain medicines, and smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>]
- Problems with the immune system

## Who is more likely to get lupus?

Anyone can get lupus, but women get it much more often than men.

Lupus is more common in African Americans than in White people. It is also more common in people of American Indian and Asian descent. African American and Hispanic women are more likely to have severe forms of lupus.

## What are the symptoms of lupus?

Lupus can have many symptoms, and they differ from person to person. Some of the more common ones are:

- Arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>], causing painful and swollen joints and morning stiffness
- Fever [<https://medlineplus.gov/fever.html>]
- Fatigue [<https://medlineplus.gov/fatigue.html>] or feeling tired often
- Red rashes [<https://medlineplus.gov/rashes.html>], most often on the face (also called the "butterfly rash")
- Chest pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/chestpain.html>] when taking a deep breath

- Hair loss [<https://medlineplus.gov/hairloss.html>]
- Pale or purple fingers or toes, from cold and stress (Raynaud phenomenon [<https://medlineplus.gov/raynaudphenomenon.html>] )
- Sensitivity to the sun
- Swelling in legs or around eyes
- Mouth ulcers
- Swollen glands
- Headache [<https://medlineplus.gov/headache.html>] and dizziness [<https://medlineplus.gov/dizzinessandvertigo.html>]
- Confusion and memory problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/memory.html>]

Symptoms may come and go. When you are having symptoms, it is called a flare. Flares can range from mild to severe. New symptoms may appear at any time.

## What other problems can lupus cause?

Lupus causes inflammation throughout your body. This can cause problems in your organs, including:

- Kidney damage (lupus nephritis).
- Heart problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseases.html>] , including inflammation in the heart (myocarditis), heart valves [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartvalvediseases.html>] , or lining of the heart muscle (pericarditis [<https://medlineplus.gov/pericardialdisorders.html>] ) .
- Inflammation of blood vessels (vasculitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/vasculitis.html>] ) .
- Blood clots [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodclots.html>]
- Inflammation of the tissue that surrounds the lungs (pleurisy [<https://medlineplus.gov/pleuraldisorders.html>] ) . This can make it painful to breathe.

Some people with lupus may be more likely to develop other conditions, such as coronary artery disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/coronaryarterydisease.html>] (CAD) and atherosclerosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/atherosclerosis.html>] .

## How is lupus diagnosed?

There is no specific test for lupus, and it's often mistaken for other diseases that cause similar symptoms. So it may take a while to get a diagnosis. To find out if you have lupus, your health care provider:

- Will ask about your symptoms, medical history, and family health history
- Will do a complete physical exam
- May order blood tests, such as ANA (antinuclear antibody) [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/ana-antinuclear-antibody-test/>] , antibodies, complete blood count [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/complete-blood-count-cbc/>] , and complement [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/complement-blood-test/>] tests
- May order other tests, such as urine tests
- May do biopsies [<https://medlineplus.gov/biopsy.html>] :
  - Skin biopsy (looking at skin samples under a microscope)
  - Kidney biopsy (looking at tissue from your kidney under a microscope)

## What are the treatments for lupus?

There is no cure for lupus, but medicines and lifestyle changes can help control it.

People with lupus often need to see different providers. You will most likely have a primary care provider and a rheumatologist (a doctor who specializes in diseases of the joints and muscles). Which other specialists you will depend on how lupus affects your body. For example, if lupus is damaging your heart or blood vessels, you would see a cardiologist (a doctor who specializes in heart diseases).

Your primary care provider should coordinate care between all of your other providers and treat other problems as they come up. You and your primary care provider will develop a treatment plan to fit your needs. You will both review the plan often to

make sure that it is working. You should report new symptoms to your provider right away so that your treatment plan can be changed, if needed.

The goals of a treatment plan are to:

- Prevent flares
- Treat flares when they occur
- Reduce organ damage and other problems
- Improve your quality of life

Treatments may include drugs to:

- Reduce fever, swelling, and pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>]
- Reduce inflammation in your body
- Prevent or reduce flares
- Reduce or prevent damage to joints
- Suppress (lower) the activity of your immune system

Besides taking medicines for lupus, you may need to take medicines for problems that are related to lupus such as high cholesterol [<https://medlineplus.gov/cholesterolmedicines.html>] , high blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodpressuremedicines.html>] , or infection.

Alternative and complementary therapies [<https://medlineplus.gov/complementaryandintegrativemedicine.html>] are therapies that are not part of standard treatments. Some people try alternative and complementary therapies to improve their lupus symptoms. But research has not clearly shown whether these treatments may help or treat lupus. Talk to your provider before trying any new treatments.


### How can I cope with lupus?

It is important to take an active role in your treatment. It helps to learn more about lupus - being able to spot the warning signs of a flare can help you prevent the flare or make the symptoms less severe.



It is also important to find ways to cope with the stress [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>] of having lupus. Exercising and finding ways to relax may make it easier for you to cope. A good support system can also help.

*NIH: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases*


### Start Here

- Lupus Basics [<https://www.cdc.gov/lupus/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Newly Diagnosed with Lupus? [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/newly-diagnosed>] (Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/le-diagnosticaron-lupus-recientemente-empiece-aqui>]
- Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (Lupus) [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/lupus>]  
 (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/informacion-de-salud/lupus>]

### Diagnosis and Tests

- ANA (Antinuclear Antibody) Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/ana-antinuclear-antibody-test/>]  
 (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-anticuerpos-antinucleares/>]
- Complement Blood Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/complement-blood-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/analisis-del-complemento/>]
- Diagnosing Lupus [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/diagnosing-lupus-guide>] (Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/diagnostico-del-lupus>]


# Treatments and Therapies

- Thunder God Vine [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/thunder-god-vine>]  
 (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)
- Treating Lupus: A Guide [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/treating-lupus-guide>] (Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/treating-lupus-guide>]

## Living With

- Living with Lupus [<https://www.lupus.org/living-with-lupus>] (Lupus Foundation of America)


## Related Issues

- For Caregivers and Parents [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/for-caregivers>] (Lupus Foundation of America)
- Immune System & Rheumatic Disease [<https://rheumatology.org/immune-system-rheumatic-disease>]  
(American College of Rheumatology)  
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/el-sistema-inmunologico-y-la-enfermedad-reumatica>]
- Lupus and the Heart, Lungs, and Blood [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/how-lupus-affects-the-heart-and-circulation>]  
(Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/como-afecta-el-lupus-al-corazon-y-la-circulacion>]
- Lupus Nephritis [<https://www.kidney.org/kidney-topics/lupus-nephritis>] (National Kidney Foundation)
- Lupus Nephritis [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/kidney-disease/lupus-nephritis>]  
 (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
- Managing Your Mental Health with Lupus [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/lupus-and-depression-know-the-signs-and-how-to-get-help>] (Lupus Foundation of America)

## Specifics

- Discoid Lupus Erythematosus [<https://www.aocd.org/page/DiscoidLupusErythe?>] (American Osteopathic College of Dermatology)
- Eating Healthy When You Have Lupus [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/diet-and-nutrition-with-lupus>]  
(Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/comer-sano-cuando-uno-tiene-lupus>]
- People with Lupus [<https://www.cdc.gov/lupus/data-research/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)



## Genetics

- Systemic lupus erythematosus: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/systemic-lupus-erythematosus>]  (National Library of Medicine)

## Images

- Discoid Lupus Erythematosus [<https://skinsight.com/skin-conditions/discoid-lupus-erythematosus/?lmiw9cApl=1>] (VisualDX)
- Systemic Lupus Erythematosus [<https://skinsight.com/skin-conditions/systemic-lupus-erythematosus/?lmiw9cApl=1>]  
(VisualDX)

## Clinical Trials


- ClinicalTrials.gov: Lupus Erythematosus, Discoid [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Lupus+Erythematosus,+Discoid%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Lupus Erythematosus, Systemic [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Lupus+Erythematosus,+Systemic%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

# Journal Articles

## References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Effects of dual-task exercises on cognitive status, disease activity and quality...  
[<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40541266>]
- Article: The Effect of Probiotic Yogurt Containing Lactobacillus rhamnosus and Bifidobacterium bifidum...  
[<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40471639>]
- Article: Deucravacitinib, an oral, selective, allosteric, tyrosine kinase 2 inhibitor, in patients...  
[<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40451616>]
- Lupus -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Lupus+Erythematosus%2C+Discoid%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Lupus+Erythematosus%2C+Systemic%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdate%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

## Find an Expert

- Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health [<https://womenshealth.gov/>]  
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/>]
- Find a Rheumatologist [<https://my.rheumatology.org/rheumatology-provider-directory>] (American College of Rheumatology)
- Lupus Foundation of America [<https://www.lupus.org/>]
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/>]   
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/portal-en-espanol>]

## Children

- Caring for Children and Teens with Lupus [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/caring-for-children-and-teens-with-lupus>]  
(Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/el-cuidado-de-los-ninos-y-los-adolescentes-con-lupus>]
- Lupus [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/lupus.html>] (Nemours Foundation)  
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/lupus.html>]

## Teenagers

- Lupus [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/lupus.html>] (Nemours Foundation)  
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/lupus.html>]

## Men

- Does Lupus Occur in Men? [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/does-lupus-occur-in-men>] (Lupus Foundation of America)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.lupus.org/es/resources/los-hombres-tambien-pueden-tener-lupus>]

## Women

- Lupus [<https://womenshealth.gov/lupus>] (Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)  
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/lupus>]
- Lupus and Pregnancy [<https://www.lupus.org/resources/planning-a-pregnancy-when-you-have-lupus>]  
(Lupus Foundation of America)
- Pregnancy and Rheumatic Disease [<https://rheumatology.org/pregnancy-rheumatic-disease>]  
(American College of Rheumatology)  
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/embarazo-y-enfermedad-reumatica>]

# Patient Handouts

- Antinuclear antibody panel [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003535.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003535.htm>]
- Collagen vascular disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001223.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001223.htm>]
- Drug-induced lupus erythematosus [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000446.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000446.htm>]
- Lupus nephritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000481.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000481.htm>]
- Systemic lupus erythematosus [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000435.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000435.htm>]



## MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Antimitochondrial antibody [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003529.htm>]
- Antinuclear antibody panel [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003535.htm>]
- Antiphospholipid syndrome - APS [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000547.htm>]
- Antithyroglobulin antibody test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003557.htm>]
- C-reactive protein [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003356.htm>]
- Collagen vascular disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001223.htm>]
- Complement [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003456.htm>]
- Complement component 3 (C3) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003539.htm>]
- Complement component 4 [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003354.htm>]
- Cryoglobulins [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003555.htm>]
- Drug-induced lupus erythematosus [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000446.htm>]
- ESR [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003638.htm>]
- Fibrinopeptide A blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003373.htm>]
- Lupus nephritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000481.htm>]
- Necrotizing vasculitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000432.htm>]
- Scleritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001003.htm>]
- Serum globulin electrophoresis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003544.htm>]

Systemic lupus erythematosus [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000435.htm>]

Thyroid peroxidase antibody [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003556.htm>]

## National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Lupus* is the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [<http://www.niams.nih.gov/>]

## Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/lupus.html>] on *Lupus*

## NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

Personal Story: Selene Suarez [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/personal-story-selene-suarez>]

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