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Autoimmune Diseases

What are autoimmune diseases?

Your **immune system** [<https://medlineplus.gov/immunesystemanddisorders.html>] protects you from disease and infection by attacking germs that get into your body, such as viruses and bacteria. Your immune system can tell that the germs aren't part of you, so it destroys them. If you have an autoimmune disease, your immune system attacks the healthy cells of your organs and tissues by mistake.

There are more than 80 types of autoimmune diseases. They can affect almost any part of your body. For example, alopecia areata is an autoimmune disease of the skin that causes hair loss. Autoimmune hepatitis affects the liver. In **type 1 diabetes** [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetestype1.html>] , the immune system attacks the pancreas. And in **rheumatoid arthritis** [<https://medlineplus.gov/rheumatoidarthritis.html>] , the immune system can attack many parts of the body, including the joints, lungs, and eyes.

What causes autoimmune diseases?

No one is sure why autoimmune diseases happen. But you can't catch them from other people.

Autoimmune diseases do tend to run in families, which means that certain genes may make some people more likely to develop a problem. Viruses, certain chemicals, and other things in the environment may trigger an autoimmune disease if you already have the genes for it.

Who is at risk for autoimmune diseases?

Millions of Americans of all ages have autoimmune diseases. Women develop many types of autoimmune diseases much more often than men. And if you have one autoimmune disease, you are more likely to get another.

What are the symptoms of autoimmune diseases?

The symptoms of an autoimmune disease depend on the part of your body that's affected. Many types of autoimmune diseases cause redness, swelling, heat, and pain, which are the signs and symptoms of inflammation. But other illnesses can cause the same symptoms.

The symptoms of autoimmune diseases can come and go. During a flare-up, your symptoms may get severe for a while. Later on, you may have a remission, which means that your symptoms get better or disappear for a period of time.

How are autoimmune diseases diagnosed?

Doctors often have a hard time diagnosing autoimmune diseases. There's usually not a specific test to show whether you have a certain autoimmune disease. And the symptoms can be confusing. That's because many autoimmune diseases have similar symptoms. And some symptoms, such as muscle aches, are common in many other illnesses. So it can take a long time and some visits to different types of doctors to get a diagnosis.



To help your doctor find out if an autoimmune disease is causing your symptoms,:

- Learn about the health conditions in your family history [<https://medlineplus.gov/familyhistory.html>] . What health problems did your grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins have? Write down what you learn and share it with your doctor.
- Keep track of your symptoms, including how long they last and what makes them better or worse. Share your notes with your doctor.
- See a specialist who deals with the symptoms that bother you most. For example, if you have rash, see a dermatologist (skin doctor).








What are the treatments for autoimmune diseases?

The treatment depends on the disease. In most cases, the goal of treatment is to suppress (slow down) your immune system, and ease swelling, redness, and pain from inflammation. Your doctor may give you **corticosteroids** [<https://medlineplus.gov/steroids.html>] or other medicines to help you feel better. For some diseases, you may need treatment for the rest of your life.

Start Here

- Autoimmune Diseases [<https://womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/autoimmune-diseases>]
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/autoimmune-diseases>]
- Understanding Autoimmune Diseases [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/autoimmune-diseases>]
 (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/informacion-de-salud/enfermedades-autoinmunitarias>]
- Understanding Autoimmune Diseases: When Your Body Turns Against You [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/06/understanding-autoimmune-diseases>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/comprender-las-enfermedades-autoinmunes>]


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/>]
- Blood Test: Immunoglobulin A (IgA) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/test-iga.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/test-iga.html>]
- C-Reactive Protein (CRP) Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/c-reactive-protein-crp-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-proteina-c-reactiva-pcr/>]
- 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/>]
- Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate (ESR) [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/erythrocyte-sedimentation-rate-esr/>]
 (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/tasa-de-sedimentacion-eritrocitica/>]
- Immunoglobulins Blood Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/immunoglobulins-blood-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-sangre-de-inmunoglobulinas/>]
- Pharmacogenetic Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/pharmacogenetic-tests/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-farmacogeneticas/>]
- Protein Electrophoresis by Immunofixation Blood Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/immunofixation-ife-blood-test/>]
 (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/electroforesis-de-proteinas-por-inmunofijacion-en-sangre/>]





Related Issues

- Associated Autoimmune Diseases [<https://gluten.org/2019/10/17/associated-autoimmune-diseases/>] (Gluten Intolerance Group)



Specifics

- About Antiphospholipid Syndrome (APS) [<https://www.genome.gov/Genetic-Disorders/Antiphospholipid-Syndrome>]  (National Human Genome Research Institute)
- Anti-GBM (Goodpasture's) Disease [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/kidney-disease/glomerular-disease/anti-gbm-goodpastures-disease>]  (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
- Antiphospholipid Syndrome (APS) [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/antiphospholipid-syndrome>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/salud/sindrome-antifosfolipidico>]
- Autoimmune Hepatitis [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/autoimmune-hepatitis>]  (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-higado/hepatitis-autoinmunitaria>]
- Autoimmune Lymphoproliferative Syndrome (ALPS) [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/autoimmune-lymphoproliferative-syndrome-alps>]  (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)
- Familial Mediterranean Fever [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/familial-mediterranean-fever/symptoms-causes/syc-20372470?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/familial-mediterranean-fever/symptoms-causes/syc-20372470?p=1>]
- Lambert-Eaton Myasthenic Syndrome [<https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/6851/lambert-eaton-myasthenic-syndrome>]  (Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center)
- Neuromyelitis Optica [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/neuromyelitis-optica>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.ninds.nih.gov/es/trastornos/neuromielitis-optica>]
- Primary Biliary Cholangitis (Primary Biliary Cirrhosis) [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/primary-biliary-cholangitis>]  (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-higado/colangitis-biliar-primaria>]
- Stiff-Person Syndrome [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/stiff-person-syndrome>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/es/health-information/disorders/el-sindrome-de-la-persona-rigida>]



Genetics

- Autoimmune polyendocrinopathy-candidiasis-ectodermal dystrophy: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/autoimmune-polyendocrinopathy-candidiasis-ectodermal-dystrophy>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Immune dysregulation, polyendocrinopathy, enteropathy, X-linked syndrome: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/immune-dysregulation-polyendocrinopathy-enteropathy-x-linked-syndrome>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Otulipenia: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/otulipenia>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- STING-associated vasculopathy with onset in infancy: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/sting-associated-vasculopathy-with-onset-in-infancy>]  (National Library of Medicine)

Statistics and Research

- Inflammation [<https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/conditions/inflammation>]  (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences)
- Study Provides Insights into Diagnosis, Treatment of Rare Immune Disease [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/study-diagnosis-treatment-rare-immune-disease>]  (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)

Clinical Trials


- ClinicalTrials.gov: Autoimmune Diseases [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Autoimmune+Diseases%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Hereditary Autoinflammatory Diseases [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Hereditary+Autoinflammatory+Diseases%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles



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

- Article: The Role of Epstein-Barr Virus in the Pathogenesis of Autoimmune Diseases. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731778>]
- Article: Comparative study of gastric microbiota between patients with autoimmune gastritis and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731012>]
- Article: A Phenome-Wide Mendelian Randomization and Colocalization Study Reveals Genetic Association Between... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40727246>]
- Autoimmune Diseases -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Autoimmune+Diseases%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+2+Years%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Reference Desk

- Overview of the Immune System [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/research/immune-system-overview>]  (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)


Find an Expert

- American College of Rheumatology [<https://rheumatology.org/>]
- Autoimmune Association [<https://autoimmune.org/>]
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/>] 
- 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

- What Is a Pediatric Rheumatologist? [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-a-Pediatric-Rheumatologist.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/paginas/what-is-a-pediatric-rheumatologist.aspx>]

Teenagers

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

Women

- 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

- Autoimmune disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000816.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)

Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000816.htm>]

- Complement [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003456.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)

Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003456.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Anti-glomerular basement membrane disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000142.htm>]

Antinuclear antibody panel [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003535.htm>]

Autoimmune disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000816.htm>]

Autoimmune hepatitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000245.htm>]

Autoimmune liver disease panel [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003328.htm>]

C-reactive protein [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003356.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>]

ESR [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003638.htm>]

Familial Mediterranean fever [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000363.htm>]

Lambert-Eaton myasthenic syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000710.htm>]

Synovial biopsy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003922.htm>]

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

Related Health Topics

Addison Disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/addisondisease.html>]

Diabetes Type 1 [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetestype1.html>]

Guillain-Barre Syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/guillainbarresyndrome.html>]

Lupus [<https://medlineplus.gov/lupus.html>]

Multiple Sclerosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/multiplesclerosis.html>]

Myasthenia Gravis [<https://medlineplus.gov/myastheniagravis.html>]

Rheumatoid Arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/rheumatoidarthritis.html>]

National Institutes of Health

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

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

5 Common Autoimmune Diseases [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/5-common-autoimmune-diseases>]

Autoimmune Diseases: What You Need to Know [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/autoimmune-diseases-what-you-need-to-know>]

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