**PAIN IN SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS**

1. **What is pain caused by ?**

Pain is usually caused by a **specific injury or a medical condition**, leading to some **tissue lesions**.

Patients feel pain when specific receptors called nociceptors detect tissue damage and transmit the information along the nerves and the spinal cord to the brain, that converts the signal into pain perception, thoughts, and emotions.

Sometimes, the **nervous system** (nerves, brain…) **itself is damaged and dysfunctional**, leading to amplification of pain perception, or pain signals without actual tissue lesion.

In patients with systemic lupus erythematosus, the inflammation associated with the disease activity is the most common cause of pain.

1. **Are there different kinds of pain?**

Pain can be classified into **3 major types of pain**, depending on the physiopathological pathway leading to the pain perception:

* **Nociceptive pain** is the most common type of pain. It is caused by **tissue damage**, resulting from an **injury** or an **inflammation**. The pain is usually well localized, with aching or throbbing quality.
* **Neuropathic pain** develops when **the nervous system (nerves, brain…) is damaged or dysfunctional**. The pain is typically chronic and described as burning, numbness or electric shocks. Many different conditions and diseases cause neuropathic pain, including nerve compression, diabetes, cancer, stroke, post-herpetic neuralgia…
* **Central sensitization** results from **an altered central perception of the pain signal**, without any tissue or neurologic lesion. This kind of pain is chronic and often associated with psychological symptoms.

1. **What about pain in systemic lupus erythematosus ?**

Pain is one of the most frequent and bothersome symptom in systemic lupus.

In patients with systemic lupus, pain often results from the **inflammation associated with the disease activity**: arthralgia, myalgia, chest pain due to pericarditis or pleurisy, oral ulcers…

**Fibromyalgia** is another frequent cause of pain in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus, as it affects 6.2% to 30% of systemic lupus patients. Fibromyalgia is a disorder in which the brain amplifies the way it processes painful signals. It is characterized by **chronic widespread musculoskeletal pain**, often associated with fatigue and mood issues.

Your pain may also result from non-lupus related causes, such as non-traumatic facture, sprain, osteoarthritis, nerve compression, or any other condition.

1. **What are the consequences of chronic pain?**

Chronic pain lasts for over 3 months, and sometimes continues long after you recover from an injury or an illness.

It often **interferes with the quality of life** and has a lot of **psychological, cognitive, and social consequences**, such as fatigue, sleep disorders, concentration difficulties, or work issues. Complications of chronic pain also include anxiety, depression, or substance abuse disorders.

1. **How to manage pain ?**

There **are many treatment options** to control pain. The aim is to find **an effective and safe combination of therapies** that works for you!

A wide range of **drugs** are used to manage pain. The pharmacologic management of pain is tailored for each patient, depending on the pain profile (acute, chronic, nociceptive, neuropathic, central sensitization…) and intensity.

Non-pharmacological options include **physical therapies** (physiotherapy, massages, physical activity…), **specific techniques** (acupuncture, transcutaneous nerve stimulation…), **psychological interventions** (cognitive behavioral therapies, hypnosis), or **relaxation techniques** (meditation, yoga…).

1. **How to handle pain when it persists?**

Here is some advice to cope with persistent pain:

* Accept support from friends, family or community groups
* Find activities you enjoy that do not worsen your pain
* Get the rest you need without feeling guilty
* Try to focus on your day-to-day function rather than on what you are not able to do