

161,000  
to 322,000

Approximately 1.5 million people in the United States have lupus. Of those, about 161,000 to 322,000 people have Systemic Lupus Erythematosus.<sup>1</sup>

# Get the Facts on Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE)



Systemic lupus erythematosus is a chronic and complex **autoimmune disease** in which the immune system attacks healthy cells by mistake. SLE can affect the joints, skin, brain, lungs, kidneys, heart, and blood vessels. The exact cause of SLE is unknown, but research suggests that environmental factors and a family history may play a role.<sup>2</sup>

## Signs and Symptoms of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

No two cases of SLE are the same and SLE can affect people differently. Signs and symptoms can also change over time.<sup>3</sup> Listed below are some common signs and symptoms of SLE:



### FATIGUE (FEELING TIRED)

50-90% of individuals with SLE identify fatigue as a primary symptom<sup>4</sup>



### FEVER

Unexplained fevers (over 100°F)<sup>4</sup>



### TENDER OR WARM SWOLLEN JOINTS

Up to 90% of individuals with SLE will experience inflammation or swelling of the joints<sup>4</sup>



### MALAR RASH

Roughly 30% of individuals with SLE experience a malar rash, which covers the bridge of the nose<sup>5</sup>



### HAIR LOSS

Some individuals with SLE experience hair loss or thinning<sup>6</sup>

## Systemic Lupus Erythematosus Flares

When symptoms come on suddenly, this may be referred to as a “flare.” Flares may be characterized by a single symptom or any group of symptoms<sup>3</sup>

### What causes a flare?

SLE flares may be triggered by environmental factors. These factors may include: stress, sunlight exposure, weather/temperature changes, infection, and chemical exposure from home cleaning.<sup>3</sup>

### What to do when a flare occurs:

When a flare occurs, the individual affected is encouraged to see their doctor to determine if any immediate steps must be taken.

“He knows not his own strength who hath not met adversity.”

*William Samuel Johnson*



**References:** 1. Helmick CG, Felson DT, Lawrence RC, et al. Estimates of the prevalence of arthritis and other rheumatic conditions in the United States. *Arthritis Rheum.* 2008;58(1):15-25. 2. About Lupus. Lupus Research Alliance website. <https://www.lupusresearch.org/understanding-lupus/what-is-lupus/about-lupus/>. Accessed October 18, 2018. 3. Squance ML, Reeves GE, Bridgman H. The lived experience of lupus flares: features, triggers, and management in an Australian female cohort. *International Journal of Chronic Diseases.* 2014:1-12. 4. Symptoms. Lupus Research Alliance website. <https://www.lupusresearch.org/understanding-lupus/what-is-lupus/symptoms/>. Accessed October 18, 2018. 5. Cervera R, Khamashta MA, Font J, et al. Morbidity and mortality in systemic lupus erythematosus during a 10-year period. *Medicine.* 2003;82(5):299-308. 6. Chang-Miller, A. Can lupus cause hair loss? Mayo Clinic website. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/lupus/expert-answers/lupus/faq-20058400>. Published September 18, 2018. Accessed March 15, 2019.



## Treating SLE and SLE Flares

SLE is generally treated by a team of physicians led by a rheumatologist. A rheumatologist specializes in arthritis and other inflammatory diseases.<sup>7</sup>

There is no cure for SLE, but certain treatments may reduce symptoms and may prevent permanent damage to the body.

Treatment for SLE is different for every person. Individuals should consult with their doctor to determine a treatment plan that is right for them!<sup>2</sup>

Live life when you have it. Life is a splendid gift – there is nothing small about it.  
Florence Nightingale

## Goals of SLE Treatment

It is important to understand the goals of your individualized SLE treatment plan. Identifying and keeping track of treatment goals is a key first step. Individuals should discuss their treatment goals with their doctor. Some SLE treatment goals may include:<sup>8</sup>

- Reducing inflammation
- Reducing organ or joint damage
- Managing symptoms
- Preventing or reducing flares
- Balancing hormones



## Self-Care and SLE

Coping with SLE can be overwhelming at times and therefore, staying positive is important. Practicing proper self-care can help and is important for both your mental and physical well-being. Some ideas for self-care may include:<sup>9</sup>

- ◆ Staying connected with friends/family
- ◆ Engaging in activities you enjoy
- ◆ Seeking humorous and upbeat entertainment
- ◆ Setting aside leisure time (eg, reading a book, going to the spa, listening to a podcast)
- ◆ Investing in a hobby
- ◆ Seeking quiet through meditation and/or prayer
- ◆ Eating healthy meals
- ◆ Working with your healthcare provider to develop an exercise program that's right for you

## More Information, Support, and Educational Resources

This list includes helpful websites and organizations that provide information about SLE, support groups, and other resources!



- ◆ **Lupus and Allies Diseases Association (LADA)**  
[www.ladainc.org](http://www.ladainc.org)
- ◆ **Lupus Research Alliance (LRA)**  
[www.lupusresearch.org](http://www.lupusresearch.org)
- ◆ **Lupus Foundation of America (LFA)**  
[www.lupus.org](http://www.lupus.org)
- ◆ **CDC Website - Lupus Information**  
[www.cdc.gov/lupus/facts/detailed.html](http://www.cdc.gov/lupus/facts/detailed.html)

**References:** 7. Glossary: Rheumatologist. Lupus Research Alliance website. <https://www.lupusresearch.org/understanding-lupus/what-is-lupus/symptoms/>. Accessed October 18, 2018.

8. Finding the Treatment Approach for You. Lupus Foundation of America website. <https://www.lupus.org/resources/finding-the-treatment-approach-for-you>. Accessed March 26, 2019.

9. Self-Care for Autoimmune Disease Patients. American Autoimmune website. <https://www.aarda.org/self-care/>. Published September, 2018. Accessed March 15, 2019.

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