

PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

Lupus

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Systemic lupus erythematosus (commonly called Lupus) is a disease in which your body's own immune system attacks many different organs such as the heart, kidneys, lungs, blood, brain, skin and reproductive organs. The number of organs involved decides how bad the Lupus is and this is different for every person. Some people with Lupus have symptoms all the time while others only sometimes. A flare-up is when the disease, along with symptoms, gets worse. Flare-ups happen unexpectedly and can last for a short or long time. When you experience a flare-up you may require treatment changes to help control symptoms.

WARNING SIGNS OF A FLARE-UP

- Lupus diagnosed before the age of 25 increases the risk of flare-ups.
- Previous disease of your kidneys, blood vessels, or brain increases the risk of flare-ups.
- Your doctor may do blood tests during a flare-up.
- The onset of mild Lupus flare-up symptoms includes fever, a red or purple rash on the face that resembles the shape of butterfly wings (malar rash) and muscle aches.
- Moderate Lupus flare-up symptoms include chest pain and swelling in the wrists or other joints.
- Severe Lupus flare-up symptoms include kidney problems that can lead to protein in the urine and chemical imbalances in the blood.

PREVENTING A FLARE-UP

- Sun sensitivity can make your symptoms worse. Avoid too much time in the sun and wear sunblock with a Sun Protective Factor (SPF) above 55.
- Eating healthy and regular exercise can help prevent or reduce being tired from a flare-up.
- Avoiding tobacco will help keep your lungs and blood vessels healthy.
- Proper use of Lupus medications from your physician can help prevent a flare-up.
- As Lupus gets worse, you may need to use medications that suppress the immune system.
- Check in with your doctor every 3-4 months to talk about how you are feeling and to check laboratory tests for blood and urine.
- Call your doctor or 911 right away if you have chest pain, trouble breathing, severe headaches, or dizziness, or high fever as Lupus may lead to neurologic, kidney or cardiovascular complications or even death. In case of any emergency, you should call your doctor or 911 right away.