

# LOVE CANAL MEDICAL FUND

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## Lupus An Immune System Disease

### What is lupus?

Lupus is a widespread and chronic (lifelong) autoimmune disease that, for unknown reasons, causes the immune system to attack the body's own tissue and organs, including the joints, kidneys, heart, lungs, brain, blood, or skin.

The immune system normally protects the body against viruses, bacteria, and other foreign materials. In an autoimmune disease like lupus, the immune system loses its ability to tell the difference between foreign substances and its own cells and tissue. The immune system then makes antibodies that are directed against "itself."

### What are the symptoms of lupus?

- Symptoms of lupus often mimic other less serious illnesses and can range from mild to life-threatening.
- Lupus can go into periods where symptoms are not present, called remission.
- Although lupus can affect any part of the body, most people experience symptoms in only a few organs.

### What are the different forms of lupus?

There are several forms of lupus: discoid, systemic, drug-induced, and overlap syndrome or mixed connective tissue disease.

- Discoid lupus is always limited to the skin and is identified by a rash that may appear on the face, neck and scalp. Discoid lupus accounts for approximately 10% of all cases.
- Systemic lupus is usually more severe than discoid lupus, and can affect the skin, joints, and almost any organ or system of the body, including the lungs, kidneys, heart or brain. Approximately 70% of lupus cases are systemic. In about half of these cases, a major organ will be affected.

- Drug-induced lupus occurs after the use of certain prescribed drugs. The symptoms of drug-induced lupus are similar to systemic lupus. The drugs most commonly connected with drug-induced lupus are hydralazine (used to treat high blood pressure or hypertension) and procainamide (used to treat irregular heart rhythms). The percentage of individuals using these drugs who develop drug-induced lupus is extremely small, and the symptoms usually fade when the medications are discontinued.

- In approximately 10% of all lupus cases, individuals will have symptoms and signs of more than one connective tissue disease, including lupus. A physician may use the term "overlap syndrome" or "mixed connective tissue disease" to describe the illness.

### Who gets lupus?

It is difficult to determine an exact number of lupus cases, and estimates vary widely.

- Based on the results of several nationwide telephone surveys, the Lupus Foundation of America estimates that approximately 1,500,000 Americans have some form of the disease.
- Despite the fact that lupus can affect men and women of all ages, lupus occurs 10 to 15 times more frequently among adult females than adult males; most often between ages 15 and 44.
- Lupus is two to three times more common among African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans.
- Only 10 percent of people with lupus will have a close relative (parent or sibling) who already has lupus or may develop lupus.
- Only about 5 percent of the children born to individuals with lupus will develop the illness.

### What causes lupus?

- Lupus is NOT infectious, rare, or cancerous or AIDS
- Researchers do not know what causes lupus.

- While scientists believe there is a genetic predisposition to the disease, it is known that environmental factors also play a role in triggering the disease.
- Hormonal factors may explain why lupus occurs more frequently in females than in males.

### **How is lupus diagnosed?**

Because many lupus symptoms mimic other illnesses, are sometimes vague, and may come and go, lupus can be difficult to diagnose.

#### **Diagnosis is usually made by a careful review of:**

- a person's entire medical history,
- physical examination coupled with
- an analysis of the results obtained in routine laboratory tests and some specialized tests related to immune status.

Currently, there is no single laboratory test that can determine whether a person has lupus or not. It may take months or even years for doctors to piece together evolving symptoms and accurately diagnose this disease.

### **How is lupus treated?**

For the vast majority of people with lupus, effective treatment can minimize symptoms, reduce inflammation, and maintain normal body functions.

- Treatment approaches are based on the specific needs and symptoms of each person.
- Because the characteristics and course of lupus may vary significantly among individuals, it is important to emphasize that a thorough medical evaluation and ongoing medical supervision are essential to ensure proper diagnosis and treatment.
- Medications are often prescribed for people with lupus, depending on which organs are involved, and the severity of involvement.

Increased professional awareness and improved diagnostic techniques and evaluation methods are contributing to the early diagnosis and treatment of lupus. With current methods of therapy, 80-90% of people with non-organ threatening lupus can look forward to a normal lifespan.

### **Love Canal Medical Fund Contact Information:**

If you have any questions about cancer or whether your illness is covered by the fund, please let us know using e-mail, the telephone, or the U.S. postal system. Our e-mail address is [lcmf@adelphia.net](mailto:lcmf@adelphia.net) and our phone number is 716-773-6578. Please leave a message and we'll make sure that your call receives a quick response. Or write us at Love Canal Medical Fund, P.O. Box 540, Grand Island, NY 14072

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