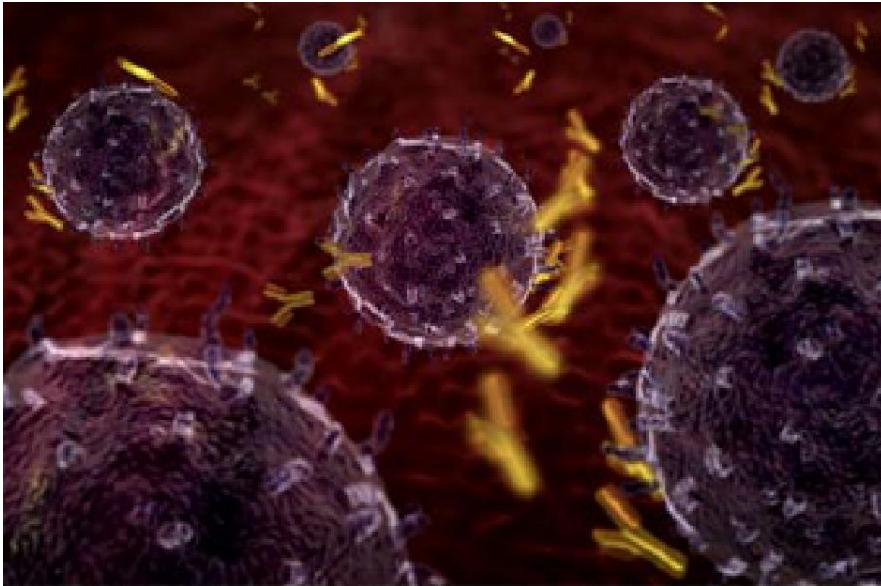




Lupus (Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, or SLE)



Overview

This chronic autoimmune disease results in the immune system attacking the body's own healthy cells. Lupus most commonly affects women age 15-44. It causes tissue damage and inflammation, and can affect any part of the body.

Risk Factors

Lupus is believed to be caused by a combination of genetic factors and environmental triggers. Although no specific gene has been linked to lupus, certain ethnic groups are at a higher risk for the disease. These include people of African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Hawaiian, or Pacific Island descent. Lupus also appears to run in families who have a history of lupus or other autoimmune diseases.

Triggers

While genetic predisposition makes a person susceptible to lupus, the disease seems to be activated by a trigger. The specific trigger may vary from person to person. Suspected triggers include exposure to sunlight or certain medications. Lupus may also be triggered by stress or injury, or by a surgical procedure. Some women develop lupus after pregnancy or childbirth.

Symptoms

Symptoms of lupus vary widely, and the disease can be difficult to diagnose. Many people develop a distinctive red rash across the face. The rash is often described as butterfly-shaped. It is centered on the bridge of the nose and spreads out across both cheeks. Lupus can cause lesions on the skin and in the mouth. It can cause fatigue, fever and chest pain. It can cause stiffness and swelling in the joints. It can cause headaches, confusion and memory loss. A person who has lupus may develop Raynaud's phenomenon, a problem that affects the vascular system of the extremities.

Treatment

Treatment options vary depending on the patient. Options may include medications to reduce pain and inflammation. Immunosuppressive drugs, antimalarial drugs and anticoagulants may also be helpful.