

# RHEUMATIC AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES

Your immune system protects you from disease and infections. White blood cells kill germs, viruses, and bacteria that can make you sick. Your immune system may also make antibodies that can protect you. However, your immune system may have an improper response and attack healthy cells and tissues by mistake. When this happens, it's called autoimmune disease.

## Common Autoimmune-Rheumatic Diseases:

### Lupus

Also known as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus or SLE, this condition occurs when the immune system attacks its own tissues, and can affect all the organs. The organs most commonly affected are the joints, skin, kidney, heart, and lungs. Therefore the symptoms vary widely and often include fever, fatigue, weakness and memory problems. A rash in the shape of a butterfly may appear across the bridge of the nose. With pregnancy, there is a higher risk of preterm birth and stillbirth.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Polymyositis/Dermatomyositis (PM)

Inflammation occurs in the muscles, with weakness around and close to the trunk of the body—especially shoulders and hips. Other symptoms may include difficulty swallowing, changes to the voice, and increased risk of falling.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

### Polymyalgia Rheumatic (PMR)

Inflammation occurs in the muscles. This may be felt as pain or stiffness, especially in the shoulders and hips.<sup>6,7</sup>

### Mixed Connective Tissue Disease (MCTD)

When symptoms of SLE, systemic sclerosis, and PM overlap, it may be MCTD. People who have MCTD often also have Raynaud's syndrome, muscle weakness, aching joints, shortness of breath and Sjogren's disease.<sup>5,8</sup>

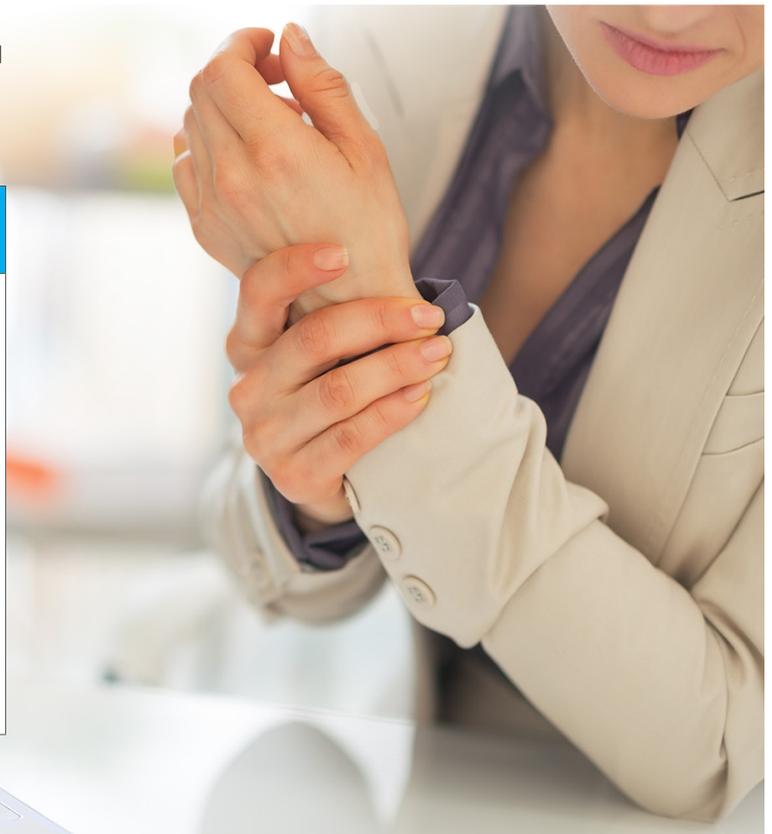
### Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

Inflammation is in the joints, mainly in the hands and feet.<sup>6,7</sup>

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## Autoimmune Disease: the Facts<sup>9,10,11</sup>

- Autoimmunity occurs naturally in all people, but not everyone gets autoimmune disease
- It tends to run in families
- Over 50 million Americans are affected by autoimmune disease
- Autoimmune disease affects women of child-bearing age more than any other group
- Autoimmune disease can affect every organ and system in the body



### Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)

Marked by pain and stiffness in the lower back and hips, AS appears to have a genetic link. This condition can lead to new bone formations on the spine, fusing it together, and resulting in a hunched position.<sup>12,13</sup>

### Scleroderma/ Systemic Sclerosis (SSc)

Scleroderma affects sections of skin and muscles under the skin. SSc also affects connective tissue and many organs as well. Limited scleroderma may also be classified as CREST syndrome.<sup>6,14,15</sup>

### Sjogren's Disease

This disease affects the glands that make moisture, so symptoms include dry mouth and dry eyes. Raynaud's Disease is often an early sign.<sup>6,16</sup>

### Temporal Arteritis or Giant Cell Arteritis (GCA)

This is inflammation that affects the blood vessels near the scalp. GCA can affect the nervous system, eyesight, and body as a whole. It may result in headaches, visual disturbances, and jaw or neck pain. It is thought to be linked with PMR as half of those with GCA develop PMR, and 15% of those with PMR develop GCA.<sup>6,12,17</sup>

### Fibromyalgia (FM)

While not an autoimmune or inflammatory disease, FM often occurs in those with an autoimmune disease, and has many of the same features. The pain of arthritic autoimmune disease may trigger or enhance the widespread pain of FM.<sup>6,12</sup>

### Raynaud's Syndrome

Discoloration of the fingertips occurs as red, white or blue when exposed to cold air or cold water.<sup>5,6,10</sup>

### What can I do?

Help your health care team get to the root of the cause. Report all symptoms and take careful notes of any changes in your body.<sup>7,11,12,17</sup>

- Be sure to **take medicines** your doctor may prescribe.
- Take antibiotics **only when necessary**.

Create a healthy environment.



- **Avoid bright sunlight** and UVB rays.
- **Wear gloves** and a facemask when working with solvents or toxins.
- **Stop smoking**, and avoid second-hand smoke.

Work closely with your health care team.



Take care. Build up your immune system.



- **Eat healthfully.** Eat fruits and vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Avoid sugar and refined grains. Buy organic when possible.
- **Exercise daily.** Try gentle activity like yoga or tai chi. Know your limits and don't overdo it.
- **Get quality sleep.**
- **Keep clean.** Wash your hands and take good care of your teeth.
- **Manage stress.**
- **Laugh every day.** Optimism helps.
- **Stay in touch.** Social connections strengthen the immune system.

1. lupus.org 2. mollysfund.org 3. uptodate.com 4. myositis.org 5. merckmanuals.com 6. rheumatology.org 7. arthritis.org 8. rarediseases.org 9. aarda.org 10. nlm.nih.gov 11. womenshealth.gov 12. niams.nih.gov 13. spondylitis.org 14. scleroderma.org 15. sclero.org 16. sjogrens.org 17. aafp.org

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