

# *What is Lupus?*



Lupus is a chronic, autoimmune disease that can damage any part of the body (skin, joints, and/or organs inside the body).

- The signs and symptoms tend to last for many years.
- In Lupus, something goes wrong with your immune system, which is the part of the body that fights off viruses, bacteria, and germs. Normally, our immune system produces proteins called antibodies that protect the body from these invaders.
- Autoimmune means your immune system cannot tell the difference between these foreign invader and your body's healthy tissues and creates autoantibodies that attack and destroy healthy tissue.
- Autoantibodies cause inflammation, pain, and damage in various parts of the body.
- Lupus is also a disease of flares (the symptoms worsen and you feel ill) and remissions (the symptoms improve and you feel better). Lupus can

range from mild to life-threatening and should always be treated by a doctor. With good medical care, most people with lupus can lead a full life.

- Lupus is not contagious, not even through sexual contact.
- Lupus is not like or related to cancer. Lupus is not like HIV or AIDS.
- Research estimates that at least 1.5 million Americans have lupus.
- It is believed that 5 million people throughout the world have a form of lupus.
- Lupus strikes mostly women of childbearing age (15–44). However, men, children, and teenager develop lupus too.
- Women of color are 2–3 times more likely to develop lupus.
- People of all races and ethnic groups can develop lupus.
- More than 16,000 new cases of lupus are reported annually across the country.

