

what does my specialist specialise in?



Autoimmune illnesses are often hard to diagnose as many of the early symptoms are non-specific and found in many illnesses including those which are not autoimmune. Symptoms can also be shared across different autoimmune illnesses. Diagnosis should always begin with a full physical examination, family history and diagnostic pathology tests including those on blood and urine. Imaging tests, such as MRI and ultrasound, may also be ordered to allow the doctor to take a closer look at specific organs and tissues. A biopsy, that is taking a tissue sample, may be needed in some cases to help identify the illness.

Illness symptoms can change which means that a diagnosis of a specific autoimmune illness can sometimes take time and in some cases a definitive diagnosis may not be possible. Treatment of the symptoms experienced may occur without a confirmed diagnosis to help alleviate symptoms and prevent long term health impacts.

The type of specialist you are sent to depends on your symptoms and your treatment can involve many specialists including your family doctor.

People that have symptoms are often sent to one or more specialist doctors to help with diagnosis and treatment. They can include:

Immunologist – Specialises in the nature of and cause of immunity and the body's defence system.

Rheumatologist – Physician who manages conditions of connective tissue: the joints, tendons, muscles and ligaments.

Nephrologist – Studies and manages diseases of the kidneys.

Cardiologist – Specialises in conditions involving the heart and its functions.

Dermatologist – Specialises in diagnosing and treating skin disorders.

Gastroenterologist – Studies and manages diseases of the gastrointestinal tract (or gut).

Neurologist – Concerned with nervous system diseases (spinal column, brain and peripheral nerves).

Ophthalmologist – examines the eyes, performs eye surgery and specialises in diagnosing and treating conditions affecting the eyes.

Endocrinologist – Studies and treats conditions of the ductless glands (endocrine glands include the pituitary, thyroid, parathyroid, adrenal glands, the ovary and testes, and part of the pancreas).

Haematologist – Studies and treats blood disorders.

Orthopaedic surgeon – Corrects and prevents disorders of bones, joints, ligaments, tendons and muscles.

Paediatrician – looks after children who have illness and is a specialist in children's disorders.

Psychiatrist – Physician who treats mental disorders and is able to help with stress and its associated problems.

It is important that all your treating specialists are informed of all treatments and therapies you use including complementary therapies and herbal remedies that you may take on both regular and irregular basis. It is also important that diagnostic and monitoring results be shared across your current managing specialists so that a more thorough health assessment can be made to aid better health outcomes. This is often done between specialist offices and electronic record systems, however, may require your personal attention.

Understanding the nature of the different symptoms you experience, including what helps alleviate symptoms is an important step in learning to live well with autoimmune illness. Your specialists are an important part of your medical and support team.