

THE MANY FACES OF LUPUS

Lupus is an autoimmune multisystem illness that presents itself in many different ways. It is often referred to as 'the disease with many faces', 'the disease with a thousand faces' or 'a wolf in sheep's clothing'. Symptoms vary from person to person so that each person's illness profile or symptom presentation is different. The disease usually begins slowly with new symptoms appearing over a period of several weeks, months or, at times, years. In general, as one symptom appears it tends to stay awhile, and over time, new symptoms will develop and present.

As an autoimmune illness, a person with lupus has within them a body engaged in a civil war with its immune system becoming overstimulated and turning on itself producing inflammation and attacking its own healthy body tissue causing damage. We don't know what causes lupus however it is believed that the environment, hormones and the persons own genetic code plays a large part in creating sensitivity and altering normal immune responses to cause inflammation, symptoms and flares. Lupus is a chronic illness meaning that it is with the patient for life resulting in the need for lifestyle changes and constant medical monitoring. It is not contagious and is not related to cancer or HIV and AIDS.

TYPES

There are different types of lupus:

- Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE the most common type),
- Cutaneous or discoid lupus (the type that Seal has which affects the skin sometimes causing lasting scarring)
- Drug-induced lupus (which generally goes away once medication is removed from system)
- Cerebral Lupus (a rarer form of lupus which involves the brain and neural pathways)
- Neo-natal lupus (affecting some babies born to mothers with lupus)

SLE - Systemic (multiple organs involved) Lupus (derived from the appearance of facial rash said to resemble a healing wolf bite (lupus, Latin for wolf)) and Erythematosus (red rash or inflammation)

It is an unpredictable illness, with symptoms appearing and disappearing as well as changing over time. Lupus patients often experience flare events which means that there symptoms are exacerbated and they become sicker for a period of time.

Flares can be triggered by UV exposure from sunlight and fluorescent lights, stress either physical or emotional stress and as a result of having just experienced an infection. Other triggers, particularly environmental triggers are currently being researched.

TIPS FOR LIVING WELL WITH LUPUS

- Learn all you can about lupus and lupus symptoms
- Learn about how lupus affects you and what might trigger a flare event
- Talk about lupus to family, friend and colleagues so that they can understand what you might be experiencing.
- Learn self-management techniques to help cope with symptoms. These techniques are used as an adjunct to traditional medical management.
- Take medications as prescribed
- Keep physically active
- Don't feel guilty about needing to rest or asking for help.
- Focus on what you can do
- Connect with others that understand your illness

October is lupus awareness month. Wear your favourite shade of purple, channel your inner wolf and raise your voice to raise awareness.