Lupus

Lupus (also called systemic lupus erythematosus or SLE) is a disorder of the immune system which normally functions to protect the body against invading infections and cancers.

CAUSES

In lupus, the immune system is over-active and produces increased amounts of abnormal antibodies that attack the patient's own tissues.

SYMPTOMS

Lupus can affect many parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, lungs, heart, nervous system, and blood vessels. The signs and symptoms of lupus differ from person to person, and the disease can range from mild to life-threatening. Typical features of lupus include:

- A butterfly shaped rash over the cheeks.
- Arthritis involving one or more joints.
- Kidney inflammation.
- Neurological disorders such as:
  - Headaches.
  - Personality changes.
  - Organic brain syndrome.
  - Peripheral neuropathies.
  - Sensory neuropathy.
  - Transverse Myelitis.
- Psychological problems including:
  - Paranoia.
  - Mania.
  - Schizophrenia.
- Seizures, paralysis and stroke.
- Fever, weight loss, hair loss, poor circulation in the fingers and toes, chest pain when taking deep breaths, and abdominal pain may also occur.
- A skin rash appearing in areas exposed to the sun.
- Sores in the mouth and nose.

TREATMENT

There is no cure for lupus. Treatment is symptomatic. Most individuals with lupus can often achieve remission or an improvement of symptoms with a combination of:

- Medication.
- Rest.
- Exercise.
- Proper nutrition.
- Stress management.

Medications used in the treatment of lupus may include:

- Aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs
- Antimalarials
- Corticosteroids
- Other immunosuppressants

How the disease may affect someone varies widely. It can depend on the organs involved and the intensity of the inflammatory reaction. The course of lupus is commonly chronic and relapsing. Often there are long periods of remission. Most patients with lupus have a normal lifespan with periodic doctor visits and treatments with various drugs. Many of the more serious problems do not affect most patients. Death is usually caused by renal failure or infection.

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