What Is an Autoimmune Disease?

by NEWLIFEOUTLOOK TEAM

Understanding Autoimmune Disease

There is an estimated 50 million people diagnosed with autoimmune disease in the United States. Seventy-five percent of those 50 million are women, according to researchers. Despite so many people affected by autoimmune disease, sufferers are still misunderstood.

Frankly, many people just don't know what autoimmune disease is.

The American Autoimmune Diseases Association (AARDA) reported that there are between 80 and 100 autoimmune diseases known to them at this time. These chronic diseases can be life-threatening and affect many different parts of the body.

What classifies an autoimmune disease is when your immune system malfunctions. Your immune system's job is to attack foreign agents that may enter your body, destroying them before they can make you sick.

However, sometimes your immune system is triggered into attacking your own perfectly healthy cells — this is autoimmunity.

If you have lupus, your immune system attacks your healthy tissues, including your skin, joints and organs. Lupus affects many parts of the body, and results in a lot of pain and sensitivity.

The process of diagnosis for any autoimmune disease can be quite long and difficult. So many have similar symptoms, and oftentimes people suffer from more than one at once.

Some common symptoms many autoimmune diseases share are fever, fatigue and malaise. Flare-ups occur when your symptoms worsen for a period of time, which can be days, weeks or even months.

These flare-ups are exhausting and painful for sufferers. When they have finally subsided, it is known as being in remission.

Autoimmune disease's cause is unknown — as is the cure. Symptoms can be managed to a degree, but until a cure is found, they will have autoimmune disease for life.

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Autoimmune Disease?
a newlifeoutlook infographic
There are currently more than
80 KNOWN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES
all of which are chronic, some life-threatening.[I]
UP TO 50 MILLION AMERICANS
suffer from autoimmune disease[II]
75% OF THOSE ARE WOMEN[III]
BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS AN
AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE?
A "normal" immune system attacks foreign agents to protect your body against disease. But with autoimmune disease, your immune system mistakes healthy tissues for foreign ones and attacks them instead. [IV]
The cause of this is unknown, but it is believed autoimmunity can be triggered by: [V]
BACTERIA
VIRUSES
DRUGS
TOXINS
What are the Most Common Autoimmune Diseases?[VI]
Lupus
Multiple Sclerosis
Rheumatoid Arthritis
Celiac Disease
Psoriasis
Hashimoto's Disease
Sjögren's Syndrome
Type 1 Diabetes
COMMON SYMPTOMS
Many autoimmune conditions occur simultaneously and share similar symptoms, making diagnosis very difficult.
Common symptoms of many autoimmune diseases include: [VII]
Fatigue
Fever
Malaise
Many parts of the body are affected, so symptoms are widely varied. Flare-ups are when these symptoms worsen, sometimes for days, weeks or months at a time.
You can ease symptoms with medical interventions and by following a healthy lifestyle, but autoimmune diseases have no cure.
Resources
I, II http://www.aarda.org/autoimmune-information/autoimmune-statistics/
III http://www.aarda.org/autoimmune-information/autoimmune-disease-in-women/
IV http://www.healthline.com/health/autoimmune-disorders#Overview1
V http://www.aarda.org/autoimmune-information/questions-and-answers/
VI http://www.healthline.com/health/autoimmune-disorders#Types2
VII http://www.healthline.com/health/autoimmune-disorders#Causes3
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