When Lupus Occurs in Children

by BRENDA VANTA

How Common Is Lupus in Children?

Although it is most known as a disease affecting adults, lupus can develop during childhood and adolescence as well. It is estimated that about 20 percent of lupus sufferers develop the disease before age 20, though it is rarely found before age five.

Symptoms of lupus in children are much the same as those in adults, with fever, extreme fatigue, facial rash, sores in the mouth and joint pain all indications of the condition.

If your child had been diagnosed with lupus, it is important to understand how this disease manifests, and work closely with a pediatrician. Consider the following tips for managing your child's lupus.

Keep Living

Encourage your child to live a life as normally as possible. Encourage him or her to go to school, make friends, play and exercise and continue all other regular activities.

However, your child will need to rest, and may need to take time out from normal activities during flare-ups.

Talk to Teachers

Build a good relationship with your child's teachers. The school should be aware that your child has lupus, because this condition affects memory and concentration and will likely impact on his or her performance and behavior in class.

Your child may also have days when they miss classes due to flares, infections or doctor's appointments. Because your child will need to avoid exposure to the sun, he or she may have to sit out of some physical education classes.

In case this condition affects the academic performance, talk to the principal and ask about an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or other options for your child. IEPs are official documents used by schools to ensure a child is able to continue their education at certain standards, despite disabilities or diseases.

Work With a Healthcare Team

Your child's pediatrician will refer your child to a pediatric rheumatologist, who will see your child regularly. They will order various blood tests and recommend a treatment.

A social worker or child psychologist can also help, since lupus can affect your child's mood, and they will likely be upset or depressed at times.

Eat Well

Cook at home, rather than buying already prepared foods, as they are often highly processed. Although there is no specific diet designed for lupus, you should make sure your child is eating a healthy diet filled with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and some lean meat and fish.

Avoid foods that contain high amounts of saturated, hydrogenated and trans fats and high amounts of sugar. Limit your child's salt intake (especially from highly processed foods) and encourage them to drink plenty of water.

Look Into Possible Allergies

It's worth investigating food allergies, including gluten. Many people diagnosed with autoimmune diseases have problems digesting gluten, and taking it off from the diet can lead to improvements. Additionally, there are documented cases of gluten sensitivity being misdiagnosed as lupus.

Lupus hasn't robbed your child of a happy, normal childhood. Working with doctors and teachers and making sure they get enough rest, exercise and good, healthy food will go a long way towards ensuring your child doesn't miss out on the joys of being a kid.