How Artistic Expression Can Help Lupus Symptoms

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Art Therapy for Lupus

Art is more than a fun way to pass the time — it's a reputable approach to treating symptoms and consequences of chronic conditions like lupus.

Art therapy programs are designed to help you explore your feelings, distract your mind and build your self-confidence; in the end, many patients are able to overcome the emotional challenges of their condition with art therapy classes, and restore some comfort and control to their daily lives.

How Artistic Expression Can Counteract Lupus Symptoms

Art therapy has proven benefits for those suffering from any chronic illness, but it can be particularly helpful for lupus patients. Lupus brings widespread discomfort that can be difficult to predict and overcome, and putting paintbrush to canvas, pencil to paper, or hands to clay can both help replace some lost freedoms, and improve some of the most distressing symptoms.

Art therapy provides:

- **A healthy indoor hobby –** Lupus and lupus treatment leaves many sufferers extremely sensitive to natural sunlight, which can mean much less spent time outside. Having to give up outdoor hobbies can quickly lead to inactivity and depression, but art can offer a new, engaging challenge that you can enjoy without braving the elements.
- **Distraction from pain and fatigue –** Sometimes the pain and fatigue of lupus can hit you like a ton of bricks, but a gentle, repetitive action like painting with big, easy brush strokes, or creating an image with pastels can be psychologically energizing and help you escape your present discomforts for a little while.
- **A renewed sense of control –** Handling the flare-ups, restrictions and worries of a chronic condition is exhausting, but it can also leave you feeling helpless. Some experts have likened artistic expression to a "container" for stress and negative feelings, a place to leave your helplessness and anxiety and replace them with a sense of accomplishment. Creating art helps to prove that your disease doesn't define you.
- **Focus on the positive –** The act of creating is very liberating, and it is an easy way to brighten your perspective. Some patients find that art provides psychological relief by tapping into nostalgic or hopeful sentiments: painting a happy scene from your memory or using an image to envision better times to come can have profound effects on your psyche, and keep your hopes high.

Best Art Therapy Approaches for Lupus

There are no hard and fast rules about which method or medium is best, but many people benefit most from a guided art therapy program. A caring and knowledgeable therapist will lead you through various projects and exercises to help release negative emotions, focus on strength and positivity, and build confidence.

Art forms you may want to consider include:

- **Painting –** Creating a picture with color is a particularly good way to explore your feelings, crystallize your thoughts and celebrate your abilities. Don't worry so much about perfect representation, but rather experiment with colors, brush strokes and pattern to express yourself in any way you need to.
- **Acting –** When it comes to escaping the pressures and stresses of daily life, acting is certainly at the top of the list. Assuming a different character not only helps you step out of your life for a bit, but your fellow actors and the audience will see you for your role and talent rather than treat you like a patient.
- **Photography –** If your fatigue has forced you to give up on some of your favourite outdoor hobbies, photography might help you inject some regular, gentle activity into your day. A good eye for composition and a bit of practice can help you explore your photographic talent without having to expend too much energy.

Of course, there are countless artistic pursuits to try, and it can take a bit of time to find the right one for you.

Dealing with lupus demands a lot of focus, and that can chip away at the thoughts, desires and ambitions that make up your identity. The key to art therapy is to transfer some of that focus to a new activity for your *own* benefit — you don't need immense talent to reap the rewards, and you don't even need to share your art with anyone else.

One great aspect of taking an art therapy class is the social reward. You can count on camaraderie and support, and the gentle obligation of attending sessions and completing the projects will go far to keep you on a therapeutic track.

Don't expect immediate results (for your artistic abilities or your lupus symptoms) but sticking with guided art therapy can help you overcome the emotional strain that comes with your physical pain and fatigue.