Coping With Lupus in Spring

by BARBARA LEECH

Another Season of Lupus Precautions

Spring is upon us, and the warmer weather and longer days fills me and my lupus-weary body with excitement. But I also realize I cannot react to spring like a colt being let out of the barn.

Lupus may react better to spring weather versus winter temperatures and piles of snow, but it is so easy to allow myself too much sunshine (and too many activities) when I feel I have been deprived of it for the last four months.

The wolf (AKA lupus) has been howling like the winds of winter for me since late November. I have been in one of the worst flares I have ever experienced.

I hurt in places I did not know could hurt, my hands and feet randomly swell for no reason, Raynaud's has been relentless, my face has that horrible scaly butterfly rash again, there are sores in my nose and mouth and my heart has also been affected.

I am ready for winter to leave and to take this flare with it. I am ready for a change in seasons and some improvement in how I feel each day.

If I Were a Sign, I Would Read "Proceed With Caution"

But, I realize that even if spring makes me think I am ready to take on more, I cannot let my excitement over warmer temperatures and brighter days cloud my judgment about jumping into too much activity.

Daily demands change for me living with lupus in spring. My children's little league practice starts and this means long cold practices on a field after school until the sun starts to set.

Weekends will now beckon me to get out there and tackle all the yard cleanup that should be done following such a long, stormy winter. And there will be that urge to indulge myself by sitting on my porch steps and soaking in the warm sunlight, even though I know I will pay the price if I do.

So no matter the urge, the expectation of others, or even the increase demand from family activities, those of us with lupus must remember that moderation is probably the safest bet for the spring season.

For everything there is a season — except maybe lupus.

Spring Into Challenges

Warmer weather is not exactly carefree for lupus patients. I suffer from sensitivity to UV rays and though many people with lupus get a raging rash or an extreme and almost immediate sunburn from any exposure, my reaction may or may not include a skin reaction.

I have discovered over time that I am not the only lupus warrior who has stroke-like symptoms or severe illness from UV rays. The sun (and extreme heat) cause me to feel dizzy, have blurred or partial loss of vision, feel shaky, have difficulty speaking and articulating thoughts and feel so weak and physically sick that its seems like I am suffering from a heat stroke (or a real stroke) — except it can come on after only 20 minutes in the sun.

But, if I am facing these challenges and taking precautions, I can help my health and avoid a flare.

Consider These Tips for Managing Lupus in Spring

Stay out of the Sun

Sadly, most of us with lupus must avoid direct exposure to UV rays. I advise wearing sunscreen every day. SPF 50 is the minimum I use to prevent severe burns that can seem to happen in mere minutes of being out in the sun.

I used to blame the deteriorating ozone layer for my sudden, easily-burned skin. Now I know it is lupus.

Wear hats to shield your face from direct sunlight. Protective clothing is a wise choice too, despite your urge to run out in your short sleeve shirt and shorts. I have some lightweight long sleeve options for anytime I know I will be in the sun for long periods of time.

I also have a beach umbrella for the kids' ball games and I seek the shade of nearby trees if that is an option. Sun exposure occurs in the car too, so try and keep your skin covered by clothing when you are on long car rides.

Next page: more tips for managing lupus in spring.

Stay Hydrated

Keep hydrated with plenty of water. I take water with me wherever I go and try to keep it handy even when I am at home. I find that if it is handy, I am more likely to drink more of it.

Add lemon slices for a natural way to help reduce swelling and cleanse the body out too. I even drink a cleansing concoction I found on a natural food and health website, and it seems to help if I have overdone on outdoor activity.

In includes a cup of hot water, lemon juice (1 tbsp.), organic apple cider vinegar (2 tbsp.), and raw organic honey (2 tsp) and a sprinkle of turmeric, a spice that naturally helps inflammation. The taste is not great, but I feel it helps me feel better and experience less of the sun-exposure-sickness I tend to feel after a day outdoors.

Consider These Tips for Managing Lupus in Spring

Plan Ahead

Plan ahead for being outside. Have extra sunglasses and a long sleeve shirt in your car along with some extra sunscreen. Occasionally, a quick outing turns into a long one and I have learned the hard way that being prepared is priceless to your health.

Set Yourself Limits

Like I said before, spring may make you feel so excited you are tempted to throw caution to the wind. Don't. Decide what you most want to do (or need to do) and tackle it in reasonable intervals.

If you have a ball game to attend for your child, don't attempt yard work that same day. Keep track of the amount of time you are in the sun too. That UV reaction can sneak up on you.

Eat Smart

Warmer weather means the start of grilling season and backyard barbeques. Resist the temptation to eat a lot of processed meats, and especially avoid nitrates that are in your typical hot dogs and sausages.

Seek organic nitrate-free versions when you shop. I love the Al Fresco brand hotdogs and chicken sausage and Applegate Farms brand makes really good natural alternative to avoid those unhealthy additives.

Avoid Soda

It used to be automatic: get a burger in one hand and a soda in the other. They just went together so well. But I discovered that even if I wasn't drinking diet soda, regular soda still had an adverse effect on how I felt and could even trigger a flare.

I now choose water for the most part or sometimes iced tea to go with my meal.

Though spring is often a chance for people to feel full of energy and an overall "rebirth" that gets us back outdoors after a long, cold winter, it can pose some challenges to those with lupus. Always remember to think through your schedule of activities and to choose the ones that mean the most, and take the necessary precautions to keep you feeling your best.