

Skin Care and Lupus

Skin problems are very common in people with lupus. Some skin rashes and sores (also called lesions or ulcers) are very specific to lupus, while others can occur in other diseases as well. A sensitivity to and too much exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of sun and some types of artificial light are responsible for aggravating some rashes and lesions. Many types of skin conditions are common in lupus.

Butterfly rash: This rash over the nose and cheeks can range from a faint blush to a rash that is very severe, with scaling. It is very sensitive to light and appears to get worse when skin is exposed to sun or certain types of artificial light. The rash may be permanent or may come and go.

Discoid lesions: These scarring, coin-shaped lesions are seen on areas of the skin that have been exposed to UV light. They may also occur on the scalp and produce a scarring, localized baldness that is permanent.

Subacute cutaneous lesions: These nonscarring, red, coin-shaped lesions are very sensitive to UV light. They can appear scaly and can mimic the lesions seen in psoriasis. They may occur only on the face or cover large areas of the body.

Mucous membrane lesions: Mouth ulcers are sometimes seen in lupus patients. Nose and vaginal ulcers may also occur. These lesions are usually painless.

Hair loss: In addition to losing hair because of discoid lesions, some lupus patients may develop a temporary, generalized hair loss followed by the growth of new hair. Hair loss may also be caused by infection or by use of corticosteroids or other lupus medications. A severe lupus flare could result in defective hair growth, causing the hair to be fragile and break easily.

Vasculitis: This is a condition in which the blood vessels become inflamed. Very small blood vessels can break and cause bleeding into the tissues, resulting in tiny, reddish-purple spots on the skin known as petechiae (pe-teke-ee-ah). Larger spots are called purpura and may look like a bruise. Vasculitis can also cause blood clots to form, skin

CARING FOR YOURSELF

- ▲ Reduce your exposure to the sun and to some sources of artificial light (especially fluorescent and halogen bulbs). The skin of people with lupus is very sensitive to the UV light that comes from these sources.
- ▲ Limit outdoor activity between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. This may mean a big change in your lifestyle if you work or play outdoors a lot.
- ▲ Wear a sunscreen on exposed areas of skin. It should have a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Be sure that the sunscreen protects against both UVB and UVA rays.
- ▲ Wear sunscreen all year round and on cloudy days as well as on sunny days. Also wear it indoors if you spend a lot of time in a room with many windows (glass does not filter out UV rays).
- ▲ Wear protective clothing, such as hats with wide brims and clothing made of tightly woven material. Thin, loosely woven material allows UV light to penetrate to the skin.
- ▲ Be aware of fluorescent light and halogen lamps. They can be found in many places and include floor lamps, overhead lights, photo-copiers, and slide projectors. Sunscreen and protective clothing can help.
- ▲ Tell your doctor immediately if any rash or sore appears or gets worse.

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