



Lupus & the Heart, Lungs, and Blood

Lupus affects different people in different ways. Many people with lupus have problems with the heart, lungs, and blood.

How Does Lupus Affect the Heart, Lungs, and Blood?

Lupus can affect each of these body parts in different ways.

Lupus and the blood

Lupus and lupus treatments can cause several problems with the blood and blood vessels, or the veins and arteries that carry blood to and from the heart. These include:

- **High blood pressure**
- **Vasculitis** (inflammation in blood vessel walls that can block blood flow to organs)
- **Anemia** (not having enough red blood cells to carry oxygen through the body)
- **Leukopenia** (not having enough white blood cells to fight infections)
- **Thrombocytopenia** (not having enough platelets in the blood to help it clot)

Some people with lupus also have **antiphospholipid antibody syndrome (APS)**, a condition that increases the risk of thrombosis (blood clots inside blood vessels). These clots can cause serious complications, including:

- **Stroke** (blocked blood flow to the brain that causes brain cells to die)
- **Heart attack** (blocked blood flow to the heart that causes heart muscle to die)
- **Pulmonary embolism** (blocked blood flow to the lungs that causes lung tissue to die)
- **Miscarriage** (loss of a pregnancy before 20 weeks of pregnancy)

Ask your doctor about your risk for APS and whether you need a blood test. If you have APS, you may need medicine to help prevent clots.

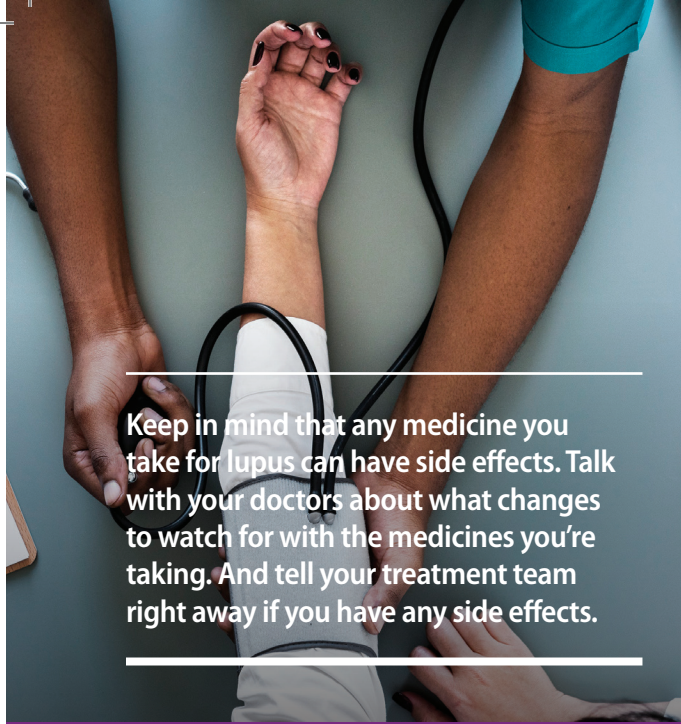
What's inflammation?

Inflammation usually happens when your immune system is fighting an infection or an injury. But lupus makes your immune system attack healthy tissue instead, and that can cause inflammation in lots of different body parts. Symptoms of inflammation in the heart, lungs, and blood vessels include chest pain when taking deep breaths, and pain and swelling in the joints.

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Keep in mind that any medicine you take for lupus can have side effects. Talk with your doctors about what changes to watch for with the medicines you're taking. And tell your treatment team right away if you have any side effects.

Take steps to protect your heart

Heart disease is a leading cause of early death in people with lupus. The good news is there are lots of things you can do to help keep your heart healthy.

Try these steps:

- ✓ If you smoke, make a plan to quit
- ✓ Eat a healthy diet
- ✓ Get regular physical activity
- ✓ Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol under control
- ✓ Ask your doctor about taking aspirin every day

Certain lupus medicines, like steroids, can increase your risk for heart disease. Talk with your doctor about how your lupus medicines affect your risk for heart disease — and only take steroids if your doctor prescribes them as part of your lupus treatment.

Other lupus blood vessel problems affect the skin, including:

- **Raynaud's phenomenon** (fingers and toes turning white or blue and feeling numb when a person is cold or stressed)
- **Livedo reticularis** (a blue or purple pattern showing through the skin that looks like lace or fishnet stockings)
- **Palmar erythema** (palms of the hands turning red)

Lupus and the heart

Lupus increases your risk for heart disease, including **coronary artery disease (CAD)**. CAD happens when material builds up in the arteries and decreases blood flow to the heart. When blood flow to the heart is completely blocked, it causes a heart attack.

Lupus can also cause inflammation in different parts of the heart, including:

- **Endocarditis** (inflammation in the heart walls and valves)
- **Myocarditis** (inflammation in the heart muscle)
- **Pericarditis** (inflammation in the sac around the heart)

Lupus and the lungs

One common lung problem in people with lupus is **pleuritis**, or inflammation of the tissue that covers the lungs. These inflamed lung surfaces can rub against each other when you breathe, causing chest pain.

Lupus can also increase your risk for:

- **Pneumonitis** (inflammation of the lung tissue)
- **Interstitial lung disease** (scarring of lung tissue that makes it hard to breathe)

Find the Right Treatment Plan

Because lupus can cause a lot of different problems with the heart, lungs, and blood, there are many different treatment options. A special doctor called a cardiologist can help you find a treatment plan that works for you.

Keep in mind that any medicine you take for lupus can have side effects. Talk with your doctors about what changes to watch for with the medicines you're taking. And tell your treatment team right away if you have any side effects.

NATIONAL

**Resource Center
on Lupus** ■

by **Lupus Foundation of America**

For more information about lupus, please visit the
National Resource Center on Lupus at:

Lupus.org/Resources

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