



Lupus & Joints, Muscles, and Bones

Lupus affects different people in different ways. Most people with lupus have problems with their joints, muscles, or bones. Sometimes lupus itself causes these problems, and sometimes they're side effects of lupus treatments.

How Does Lupus Affect the Joints, Muscles, and Bones?

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

Lupus and the joints

Lupus can cause pain and inflammation in and around your joints. These problems usually affect joints in the fingers, wrists, elbows, knees, ankles, and toes. Lupus joint problems usually don't cause long-term joint damage.

Lupus can cause:

- **Arthritis** (inflammation in the joints)
- **Arthralgia** (joint pain without inflammation)
- **Tendonitis** (inflammation in the tissues that connect muscle to bone)
- **Tendon laxity** (unusual looseness in the tissues that connect muscle to bone)
- **Carpal tunnel syndrome** (a condition that causes pain, tingling, and numbness in the hand due to inflammation in the wrist)

Common symptoms of lupus joint problems are joint pain and stiffness. Symptoms may feel worse in the morning and get better as the day goes on.

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 joints include swelling, redness, heat, and pain.

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The Cruel Mystery

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Take steps to protect your joints and muscles

When you have muscle or joint pain, it can be hard to be active. But when you're less active, your muscles get weaker, and your joint pain can get worse.

Work with your rheumatologist to build a physical activity plan that's right for you. If you have muscle weakness, physical therapy can help strengthen your muscles. Your rheumatologist can refer you to a physical therapist.



Take steps to protect your bones

Try making these changes to reduce your risk of osteoporosis and AVN:

- ✓ If you smoke, make a plan to quit
- ✓ If you drink alcohol, drink moderately

And to further reduce your risk of osteoporosis:

- ✓ Eat foods with plenty of calcium and vitamin D
- ✓ Get regular physical activity
- ✓ Get a bone density test every 1 to 2 years

Lupus and the muscles

Lupus often causes **myalgia**, or aches and pains in the muscles. Less often, lupus can cause **myositis**, or inflammation in the muscles — usually in the hips, thighs, shoulders, and upper arms. The most common symptom of myositis is muscle weakness. When you have lupus myositis, it can be hard to do things like stand up out of a chair or raise your arms.

Some medicines used to treat lupus, like steroids, can cause **drug-induced muscle weakness**. This side effect usually goes away when you stop taking the medicine that caused it.

Lupus and the bones

Lupus increases your risk for **osteoporosis**, a bone disease that makes bones weak and more likely to break. Other factors also increase your risk for osteoporosis, including:

- Taking steroids as part of your lupus treatment
- Being less physically active when lupus causes pain and fatigue (feeling tired often)
- Having low levels of vitamin D in your blood

Osteoporosis has no symptoms, so the only way to know if you have it is to get a bone density test. This test is like an X-ray or scan of your body to measure how strong your bones are.

Taking steroids also increases your risk for **avascular necrosis (AVN)**, a condition that causes bone tissue to die. Symptoms include pain in the hips, knees, and shoulders.

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.

Find the Right Treatment Plan

Because lupus can cause a lot of different muscle, joint, and bone problems, there are many different medicines and treatments. Your rheumatologist can discuss treatment options with you.