



Who Treats Autoimmune Diseases?

Your primary care physician and specialists can help you manage autoimmune disease symptoms. Specialists who treat autoimmune diseases include:

- Nephrologist**—Treats kidney problems
- Rheumatologist**—Treats arthritis and other rheumatic diseases
- Endocrinologist**—Treats gland and hormone problems
- Neurologist**—Treats nerve problems
- Hematologist**—Treats diseases that affect blood
- Gastroenterologist**—Treats digestive system problems
- Dermatologist**—Treats diseases that affect the skin, hair, and nails
- Physical therapist**—Helps patients with stiffness, weakness, and restricted body movement
- Occupational therapist**—Helps patients find ways to make activities of daily living easier
- Speech therapist**—Helps patients with speech problems from illness
- Audiologist**—Helps people with hearing problems
- Vocational therapist**—Helps people with job training who cannot do their current jobs due to illness/health problems
- Counselor**—Helps patient find ways to cope with illness

Autoimmune Disease Treatments

The type of treatment or medicine you need depends on:

- Which disease you have
- How severe it is
- Your symptoms

Treatment can:

- Relieve symptoms
- Replace vital substances in your body that you can't produce on your own
- Suppress the immune system

8 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM HEALTHY

- 1 Eat a healthy diet of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains.
- 2 Get regular physical activity, but don't overdo it.
- 3 Be sure to get enough sleep.
- 4 Wash your hands.
- 5 Visit your healthcare provider to keep your vaccinations up-to-date.
- 6 Limit alcohol.
- 7 Don't smoke.
- 8 Reduce stress.



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Nothing is more important to us than ensuring that you receive a positive experience at our hospital. Whether you are delivering a baby, having surgery, or receiving emergency treatment or other services, we remain committed to providing you the best care, close to home.

Safety is at the foundation of our care, and we value your continuing trust in our hospital. As always, we remain prepared to treat you at our hospital in a safe environment. You can visit us with confidence knowing that we will do everything we can to not only make your experience positive, but also as safe as possible. We are here for you.

Just like our hospital systems need to be healthy to work efficiently and properly to perform at our best, so do the systems of the human body.

What Is Your Immune System?

Your immune system is your body's protection against infection and illness. It is highly complex, but it only has one mission—to seek and destroy parasites and germs like bacteria and viruses. Unfortunately, your immune system can sometimes also cause problems.

Some people are born with defective immune systems, but most other immune disorders are caused from either an excessive immune response or an "autoimmune attack."

Autoimmune Diseases

One of your immune system's main jobs is to know the difference between germs and parasites, and your body's own cells. When it can't tell the difference, an autoimmune disease can occur.

- More common in women than in men
- Affect more than 23.5 million Americans
- Over 100 different types
- Symptoms cross many specialties and can affect all body organs
- Are a leading cause of death and disability

Who Is at Greatest Risk?

- Women of childbearing age
- Family history
- Individuals that are overweight or obese
- Smokers
- People who have exposure to certain things in the environment or viral/bacterial infections
- People of certain races since some autoimmune diseases are more common for some ethnicities

Diseases Caused by Over-Reaction of the Immune System

- Asthma
- Familial Mediterranean Fever
- Crohn's disease (inflammatory bowel disease)



Common Autoimmune Disease Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Joint pain/swelling
- Skin issues
- Abdominal pain/digestive problems
- Recurring fever
- Swollen glands

Getting a Diagnosis

While it can be a stressful, long process to get a diagnosis, it's important to find the cause if you are having symptoms. Many autoimmune diseases share the same symptoms, so they can be difficult to diagnose.

FIVE STEPS TO GETTING A DIAGNOSIS

- 1 Know your family history and share it with your healthcare provider.
- 2 Record any symptoms.
- 3 See a specialist.
- 4 Get another opinion if necessary.
- 5 Don't give up.

Five Most Common Autoimmune Diseases

There are over 100 autoimmune diseases affecting nearly 5% of the population. Here are the most common ones:

1. Rheumatoid arthritis

- Chronic joint disease that damages the joints of the body
- Potentially affects the internal organs of the body
- Can lead to disability
- Can affect children

Symptoms:

- Tender, warm, swollen, stiff joints
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Loss of appetite

2. Hashimoto's Disease

- Occurs when your immune system attacks your thyroid
- Can cause underactive thyroid
- Affects about five people out of 100

Symptoms:

- Tiredness
- Weight gain
- Trouble tolerating cold
- Joint and muscle pain
- Constipation
- Dry, thinning hair
- Heavy or irregular menstrual periods and problems becoming pregnant
- Depression
- Memory problems
- Slowed heart rate

3. Celiac disease

- Chronic genetic disease of the digestive tract that interferes with the digestion and absorption of nutrients
- Affects more than 2.5 million Americans
- People with celiac disease cannot tolerate gluten, which is a protein commonly found in wheat, rye, barley, and oats
- Left untreated may increase risk lymphoma, a type of cancer

Symptoms:

- Diarrhea
- Bloating
- Gas
- Fatigue
- Weight loss
- Iron-deficiency anemia
- Constipation
- Depression

4. Graves' disease

- An immune system disorder that results in the overproduction of thyroid hormones (hyperthyroidism)
- Affects about 1 in 200 people

Symptoms:

- Anxiety and irritability
- A fine tremor of your hands or fingers
- Heat sensitivity and an increase in perspiration or warm, moist skin
- Weight loss, despite normal eating habits
- Enlargement of your thyroid gland (goiter)
- Change in menstrual cycles
- Erectile dysfunction or reduced libido
- Frequent bowel movements
- Bulging eyes (Graves' ophthalmopathy)
- Fatigue
- Thick, red skin usually on the shins or tops of the feet (Graves' dermopathy)
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat (palpitations)

5. Type 1 diabetes

- A condition that impairs your body's ability to properly process food to use as energy
- Affects 1.6 million Americans, including children
- People with Type 1 diabetes don't produce insulin
- Insulin is a hormone that the body needs to get glucose from the bloodstream to cells

Symptoms:

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Extreme hunger
- Unintended weight loss
- Irritability and other mood changes
- Fatigue and weakness
- Blurred vision

