



Sample Media Interview Questions and Answers

Q. What is lupus?

A. Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease in which the immune system is out of balance, causing it to become destructive to any tissue or organ in the body, including the skin, joints, blood and blood vessels, heart, lungs, kidneys, and brain.

Q. How many people have lupus?

A. The exact number is not known because epidemiological data on lupus is outdated and no longer reliable. However, based on several national surveys, the Lupus Foundation of America estimates that approximately 1.5 million Americans and at least five million people worldwide have a form of lupus. Lupus is not a rare disease. Also, lupus affects more than just the person with the disease. The financial and emotional burdens extend to the entire family.

Q. Who gets lupus?

A. Ninety percent of the people with lupus are female. While people of all races and ethnicities can develop lupus, the disease occurs two to three times more frequently in African American, Asian, Latina, and Native American women than in Caucasian women. Lupus most often develops between the ages of 15 and 44.

Q. What causes lupus?

A. Although the exact cause or causes of lupus remain unknown, genetic and environmental factors are suspected of playing a role in its development. Efforts are underway to identify the genes that may make a person susceptible to lupus. However, researchers have not yet identified a specific gene or set of genes known to cause lupus. Some of the environmental factors that may trigger the disease are: infections, ultraviolet light, extreme stress, hormones, antibiotics (especially sulfa-based antibiotics) and certain medicines.

Q. What are some of the symptoms of lupus?

A. Common lupus symptoms include: painful or swollen joints lasting more than three months; unexplained fevers lasting several days; persistent extreme fatigue and weakness even after restful sleep; skin rashes, especially in the shape of a butterfly across the nose and cheeks; sensitivity to sunlight; pain in the chest upon deep breathing; sores in the nose and mouth; hair loss; and seizures.

Media Q&A About Lupus

Q. How is lupus diagnosed?

A. Lupus can be difficult to diagnose. A survey of Lupus Foundation of America members revealed that more than half of the people with lupus suffered four or more years and visited three or more doctors before being correctly diagnosed with lupus. Symptoms mimic other illnesses and conditions, and the disease may go into periods of remission, making diagnosis difficult. There is no specific test that can tell whether a person has lupus. It is not unusual for a person to experience symptoms for months, even years, before being diagnosed with lupus.

Diagnosis of lupus is made after a careful review of a person's entire medical history, coupled with an analysis of the results of routine laboratory tests and some specialized tests related to immune status.

There are eleven diagnostic criteria. Generally, a patient needs to meet at least four of the criteria, including blood tests that would point to a positive diagnosis of lupus.

Q. Is lupus a fatal disease?

A. Lupus can be fatal. Thousands of individuals die from complications of lupus every year. However, early diagnosis and improved management of lupus enable most people with the disease to live a normal lifespan. Unfortunately for many who have the disease, lupus remains a debilitating and devastating illness that greatly impacts their quality of life. A Lupus Foundation of America survey found that one in five people with lupus are permanently disabled by the health consequences of the disease.

Q. Is there a cure for lupus?

A. Not at the present time. However, treatments are available to control symptoms and keep the disease under control in most cases. Therapies vary and depend on which organs are affected and the severity of the disease activity. Treatments include (a) aspirin, (b) non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (c) corticosteroids, such as prednisone; (d) anti-malarial drugs, such as Plaquenil; (e) and immunosuppressive and chemotherapy drugs, such as Cytoxan. There is a robust pipeline of potential new therapies in various stages of development and clinical testing, which provides people with lupus hope for a better quality of life in the near future.

Q. What should our audience do if they exhibit symptoms of lupus?

A. They should talk with their doctor immediately. Provide the doctor with a history of symptoms, even if the symptoms are not present at this time. The physician may order additional tests or refer the patient to a rheumatologist or dermatologist.

Q. Where can people obtain more information about lupus?

A. They can visit the Lupus Foundation of America website at www.lupus.org or call the LFA toll-free (English / Para información en español) at 1-800-558-0121 to obtain a free brochure about lupus.