



# Lupus & the Skin

Lupus affects different people in different ways. Most people with lupus have skin problems, like rashes or sores. Sometimes lupus affects only the skin, and sometimes it affects other parts of the body, too.

## How Does Lupus Affect the Skin?

People with lupus can have many different skin problems.

Skin problems that only happen to people who have lupus are called **cutaneous lupus**. There are 3 main types of cutaneous lupus:

- **Chronic cutaneous lupus** (also called discoid lupus) causes round, disc-shaped sores, usually on the face and scalp. The sores can cause scars or changes in skin color.
- **Subacute cutaneous lupus** causes a red scaly rash or red ring-shaped sores. It usually happens on skin that gets sunlight, like the neck and arms.
- **Acute cutaneous lupus** causes a butterfly-shaped rash on the cheeks and nose that looks like a sunburn (called malar rash). Sometimes it affects other body parts, like the arms and legs.

People with lupus can have other skin problems, like:

- **Mucosal ulcers** (sores inside the mouth, nose, or vagina)
- **Sores on the scalp** that can make hair fall out

People with lupus can also have problems with blood or blood vessels that you can see on the skin. A few examples include:

- **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)

### Protect yourself from cold temperatures

If you have Raynaud's phenomenon, protecting your skin from the cold can help. Try wearing warm gloves and thick socks when you're outdoors in cold weather or indoors in air conditioning.

Help Us Solve  
The Cruel Mystery

**LUPUS**<sup>®</sup>

FOUNDATION OF AMERICA



Lupus skin problems are not contagious — you can't catch them or give them to someone else.

### What do lupus skin problems feel like?

Sometimes these skin problems feel itchy or painful, and sometimes they don't. The symptoms can come and go, and they can feel different from person to person. If you have pain or other symptoms from lupus, talk with your doctor about treatment options.

### Find the Right Treatment Plan

Because lupus can cause a lot of different skin problems, there are many different kinds of medicine that can treat them. A special doctor called a dermatologist can help you find a treatment plan that works for you.

**If you're pregnant or planning to get pregnant, be sure to talk with your doctors about which treatment options are safe for you and your baby.**

Sometimes you can treat lupus skin problems with creams or gels that you put directly on your skin. You may also need to take pills or other treatments that affect all the systems in your body.

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.

### Protect your skin from ultraviolet (UV) light

Most people with lupus are sensitive to UV light — and it can trigger lupus skin problems. Follow these tips to protect yourself:

- Use sunscreen with SPF 60 or higher that blocks both UVA and UVB rays
- Wear long sleeves, pants, and wide-brimmed hats made of fabrics that protect you from the sun
- Plan outdoor activities for early in the morning or later in the evening

You may be sensitive to indoor lighting, too. If indoor light bothers you, try putting light shields over fluorescent bulbs. You can also buy light bulbs that send out low amounts of UV radiation, like LED lights.

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**

©2019 LUPUS FOUNDATION OF AMERICA, INC.