

Lupus nephritis

Kidney inflammation caused by lupus

With early treatment, many people bring lupus nephritis under control and protect their kidneys.

What is it?

Lupus is an autoimmune disease: the immune system attacks the body's own tissues. When lupus inflames the kidneys' filters, it's called lupus nephritis. Protein and blood leak into the urine, and without treatment the kidneys can be damaged.

Who gets it?

Up to half of adults with lupus develop kidney involvement, often in the first few years. It's more common in women and in people of African, Asian, Hispanic or Indigenous background.

What you might notice

Often nothing at first, so regular urine tests are important. You may notice foamy urine, pink or cola-coloured urine, swelling in your legs or around your eyes, or high blood pressure.

How it's found

- urine tests for protein and blood, and blood tests
- a **kidney biopsy**: a small sample of kidney is taken with a needle and looked at under a microscope. It shows the type of lupus nephritis, which guides treatment.

How it's treated

- **Medicines that calm the immune system.** Stronger treatment for several months controls the inflammation. Lower doses then continue for years to prevent flares.
- A long-term lupus medicine that lowers the risk of flares.
- Blood pressure medicines that also reduce protein in the urine.

Many people go into remission. Flares can happen, so check-ups continue when you feel well.

What you can do

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed, and don't stop them without talking to your team.
- Keep up with urine and blood tests.
- **Plan pregnancy with your team.** Some lupus medicines can harm an unborn baby, and pregnancy is safest when lupus has been quiet for a while. Use reliable birth control until then.
- Ask which vaccines you should have. These medicines raise infection risk.
- Protect your skin from the sun, eat less salt and don't smoke.

Contact your team or go to emergency if you have

- fever or other signs of infection while taking medicines that calm the immune system
- much less urine than usual, or swelling that gets worse quickly

Learn more: Lupus Canada, lupuscanada.org. Kidney Foundation of Canada, kidney.ca.

General information only. This sheet doesn't replace advice from your own health care team. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

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