

Could You Have an Autoimmune Disorder? How to Spot the Signs

Description

Autoimmune disorders are health conditions where your immune system begins to attack your own body. This happens because your immune system can't tell the difference between foreign cells and your own cells, causing it to treat your cells like an illness. There are different types of autoimmune diseases, some of which are fairly common and others that are much rarer. Some autoimmune disorders that you might have heard of include rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis, lupus, and some thyroid diseases such as Graves' disease.

Autoimmune diseases can often be difficult to diagnose. Often, the symptoms can be hard to pin down or have a lot of crossover with many other health conditions. For example, many people may experience problems such as fatigue or aching muscles, which could be explained by many different illnesses or [health](#) issues. If you experience these symptoms, it can be easy to dismiss them as simply being tired or stressed. Even if you see a doctor, they can find it difficult to diagnose anything.

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However, there are some things you can look out for that might indicate you have an autoimmune disease. If you have a set of symptoms together and have ruled out other causes, you can bring it up to your general practitioner or see a [rheumatologist](#).

Here are some common signs that you could have an autoimmune disorder, what it could be, and what you can do next.

Common Symptoms of Autoimmune Disorders

The symptoms of an autoimmune disorder can vary, depending on the specific disease. However, there are some common symptoms that are often experienced by people with several autoimmune conditions.

Some of the common problems that you might experience include:

- Unexplained tiredness and fatigue
- Pain and swelling in the joints
- Skin problems
- Digestive issues and abdominal pain
- Fever
- Swollen glands

Getting [diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder](#) can be difficult. There isnâ€™t usually a single test that you can have that will reveal whether you have one or not, and the symptoms can be attributed to many other things. However, if you start to experience new symptoms after previously being healthy, itâ€™s important to get them checked out.

Common Autoimmune Disorders

There are some autoimmune diseases that are more common than others. Although these conditions are more likely, it doesnâ€™t rule out the possibility of a disease that is less common. Take a look at some of the autoimmune diseases that you could be more likely to develop.

Rheumatoid arthritis â€“ Rheumatoid arthritis is a type of arthritis that is caused by the immune system attacking the joints. It causes pain, swelling, and stiffness and usually affects joints such as the hands, feet, and wrists. People with rheumatoid arthritis can have flare-ups, where symptoms are worse. Over time, it can cause permanent damage to the joints.

Psoriasis â€“ This is a condition that affects the skin, creating dry, scaly, and thick patches of skin. Some people with psoriasis might also have psoriatic arthritis.

Lupus â€“ Lupus can damage different areas of the body, including the joints, organs, and skin. It can damage the kidneys, lungs, heart, brain, and blood cells.

Thyroid diseases â€“ Thyroid diseases such as [Gravesâ€™ disease](#) (hyperthyroidism) and Hashimotoâ€™s thyroiditis (hypothyroidism) are also autoimmune disorders that are fairly common. They can affect your weight, energy levels, mood, and more.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) – MS affects the brain and spinal cord and can result in a range of symptoms, including difficulty with movement, fatigue, vision problems, muscle stiffness, balance problems, and difficulties with learning or thinking.

Who Has a Higher Risk of Autoimmune Diseases?

Some people may have a higher risk of developing an autoimmune disease. This includes genetic factors. There is evidence that some autoimmune diseases run in families so if you have a family member with an autoimmune disease, there is a higher chance you could have it too. However, it still isn't a guarantee that you will have the same disease. In the case of [rheumatoid arthritis](#), being overweight can increase your chances of developing it, due to the stress put on your joints. Smokers also have a higher chance of developing a number of autoimmune disorders. Some medications can also lead to an autoimmune disease, although it's not very common.

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Treatment for Autoimmune Diseases

Treatments for autoimmune disorders vary depending on the disorder. There are various medications and therapies that might be used to treat the disease and its symptoms. Steroids may be used for short periods to treat pain and other symptoms. Rheumatoid arthritis is usually treated with disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARD), but biological treatments offer a newer method of treatment.

People with lupus often need treatment for a number of health problems. Mild lupus may only cause tiredness and joint or skin problems, but more severe lupus can cause inflammation of other parts of the body, including the kidneys, heart, and lungs. Serious damage to these organs can be life-threatening. People with lupus may need help from [doctors specializing in lupus nephritis](#) and other problems that are caused by the disease. Some people might require kidney transplants if their kidneys are severely affected by lupus.

The thyroid condition Gravesâ€™ disease might be treated with radioactive iodine therapy. This involves taking radioactive iodine by mouth to destroy overactive thyroid cells. Other treatments can include anti-thyroid medications and beta-blockers, as well as surgery, and steroids. Hashimotoâ€™s thyroiditis, which causes an underactive thyroid, is treated by replacing the missing hormone to relieve the symptoms.

Autoimmune diseases can have a wide range of symptoms. If you have any of the symptoms that could be evidence of an autoimmune disease, it doesn't mean that you necessarily have one. There are many other things that some of these symptoms could relate to, from vitamin deficiencies to viruses or even stress. However, if you think that you could have an autoimmune disease, it's important to see a medical professional and have your symptoms assessed. Doctors and other medical professionals can help to ensure the right tests are carried out and the root of the problem is discovered.

Date Created
2022/05/05