

# Lupus

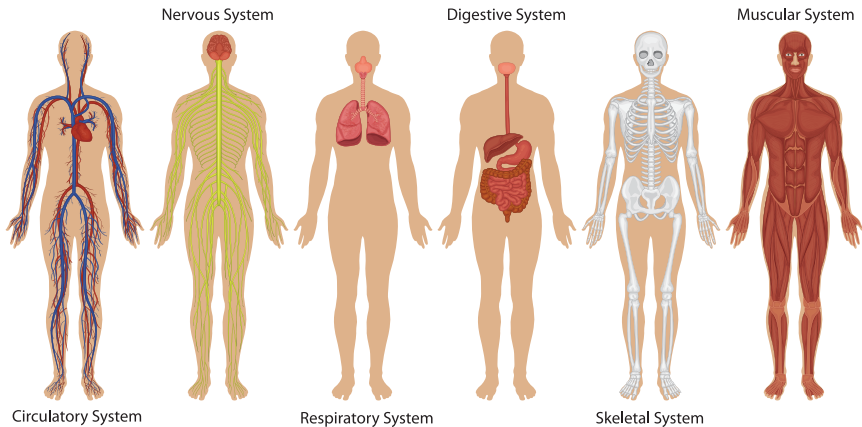


The Rheumatology service specialises in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the musculoskeletal system. Other than providing inpatient and outpatient consultation, our patients also benefit from in-house support services such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and radiology services including bone densitometry studies. Patients are admitted through the emergency department, referred from polyclinics and general practitioners, or transferred from other departments within the Ng Teng Fong General Hospital or from other healthcare facilities such as nursing homes, community hospitals and other hospitals.

# What is lupus?

A healthy immune system is able to fight viruses, bacteria and parasites by producing antibodies against them. In lupus patients, the immune system is dysregulated and produces auto antibodies that attack its own healthy tissues and organs.

Lupus (also known as systemic lupus erythematosus) is a chronic\* auto-immune disease that can affect any part of the body. Areas commonly affected include the joints, skin, kidneys, blood cells, brain, heart, lungs and intestines.



\*Chronic: refers to something that continues or persists over an extended period of time, is long-lasting and does not go away easily or quickly.

# What causes lupus?

The cause of lupus is unknown. However a combination of genetics, exposure to sunlight, stress and/or infection may trigger lupus.

## What are the symptoms?

Clinical presentation of lupus vary between individual patients. The onset of symptoms may be gradual or sudden, with varying severity. Lupus patients may experience episodes of worsening signs and symptoms known as flares. These will usually improve with proper treatment.

Common signs and symptoms of lupus:

- Abnormal behaviour
- Butterfly rash on the face which is aggravated by sun exposure
- Chest pain when breathing and shortness of breath
- Easy bruising
- Fever, fatigue and weight loss
- Joint pain, stiffness and swelling
- Hair loss
- Mouth ulcers
- Raynaud's (fingers turning white or blue with cold exposure)
- Seizures
- Swelling around the eyelids, feet and legs



Butterfly rash

## How is a diagnosis made?

Your doctor will perform a thorough assessment of your symptoms, followed by a clinical examination and laboratory studies to diagnose your condition.

# What are the treatment options?

## Medication

- **NSAIDS** (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) or the newer COX-2 inhibitors are used to reduce inflammation and are effective in treating fever, muscle aches, joint pain and swelling.
- **Antimalarial drugs** such as hydroxychloroquine, chloroquine are prescribed to patients with mild lupus and/or skin involvement. Patients on antimalarial drugs should have a routine eye examination with an eye doctor to monitor for retinal toxicity.
- **Corticosteroids** such as prednisolone to effectively reduce inflammation, especially during episodes of flares. Serious long-term side effects may sometimes occur that include osteoporosis, increased risk of infection, skin-thinning, weight gain, glucose intolerance, high blood pressure, moon face, etc. Patients will usually be prescribed the lowest dose for the shortest period of time to control symptoms.
- **Immunosuppressive drugs** such as cyclophosphamide, azathioprine, rituximab, mycophenolate mofetil and cyclosporine to suppress the immune system. It is used in lupus patients with severe blood, brain or kidney involvement.

Do not stop, start a new medication or reduce a dose of medication without consulting your doctors.



# What are the special issues associated with lupus?

- **Pregnancy**

Lupus patients can have a safe pregnancy and delivery. However, it is important to discuss with your doctor before conceiving to ensure certain medications do not cause harm to the fetus. Lupus patients are advised not to get pregnant when their diseases are not well-controlled.

- **Neonatal lupus**

Although rare, babies born to mothers with lupus may sometimes develop neonatal lupus. It is a rash that will resolve after a few weeks. Some babies may develop heart problems. As such, close monitoring for signs of fetal heart involvement is crucial during pregnancy and postpartum.



## What can I do?

- Avoid the sun as it may aggravate lupus symptoms. Use a sunblock, wear a hat and protective clothing, especially if your skin is sensitive to sunlight.
- Follow up with your doctor closely on treatment. Most lupus patients can continue to lead normal and fulfilling lives.

- Learn more about lupus and get support from friends, family and other lupus patients. Read up on lupus to understand more about the disease and its treatments. Stay positive and speak to your doctor on any concerns.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle, which includes getting enough rest, regular exercise and having a healthy diet. Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol.



### **For more information**

The National Foundation (Singapore) [www.arthritis.org.sg](http://www.arthritis.org.sg)

The Lupus Association (Singapore) [www.e-lupus.org](http://www.e-lupus.org)

The Lupus Foundation of America [www.lupus.org](http://www.lupus.org)

## For more information

### Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Jurong Community Hospital

1 Jurong East St 21, Singapore 609606

[www.ntfgh.com.sg](http://www.ntfgh.com.sg) | [www.jch.com.sg](http://www.jch.com.sg)

### Clinic opening hours

Monday – Friday: 8.30am – 5.30pm

Saturday: 8.30am – 12.30pm (Selected clinics only\*)

Dental Clinic: Monday – Thursday: 8.00am – 5.30pm, Friday: 8.00am – 5.00pm

\*Please refer to our websites for more details.

### General enquiries & appointments

General enquiries line: 6908 2222 (24-hr)

Fax: 6716 5500 | Email: [contactus@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:contactus@nuhs.edu.sg)

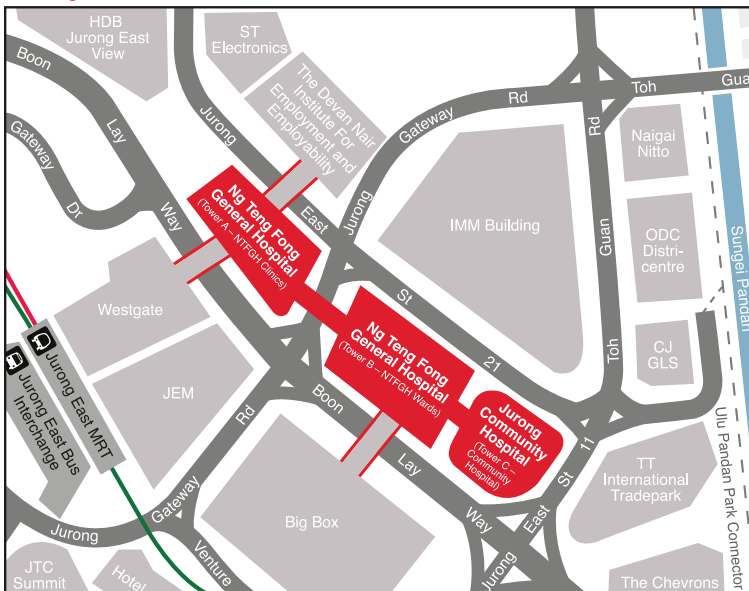
Appointment line: 6908 2222 (Monday – Friday: 8.00am – 5.30pm, Saturday: 8.00am – 12.30pm)

Fax: 6716 2200 | Email: [appointment@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:appointment@nuhs.edu.sg)

Dental appointment line: 6716 2233 (Monday – Friday: 8.00am – 5.30pm)

Fax: 6716 2200 | Email: [JHCampus\\_Dental@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:JHCampus_Dental@nuhs.edu.sg)

## Getting there



### By train

Alight at Jurong East MRT Station

### By bus

#### Jurong East Bus Interchange

41, 49, 51, 52, 66, 66B, 78, 78A, 79, 79A, 97, 97E, 98, 98M, 105, 143, 143M, 160, 160A, 160M, 183, 183B, 197, 333, 334, 335, 506

#### Along Boon Lay Way

49, 99, 333, Private bus service 625, 990

### Disclaimer:

The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition. Information is accurate at the time of printing.