

Autoimmune Diseases

Autoimmune disorders cause the body's immune system to backfire.

Question: I've had lupus for more than 10 years. Is a DHEA supplement effective for treating this disease?

F.A., Chicago, Illinois

Answer: Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, commonly called lupus or SLE, is an autoimmune disease that can cause pain and tissue damage in the body. It is a chronic inflammatory condition that especially affects the skin, joints, blood and kidneys. Normally the immune system protects the body from micro-organisms foreign to it, but with autoimmune disorders the immune system backfires and attacks normal tissues.

There are five types of Lupus Erythematosus, the most serious type being Systemic (SLE). There is no known cure for it.

DHEA (short for dehydroepiandrosterone) is a hormone created by the adrenal glands. The body uses it to make the sex hormones estrogen and testosterone. When sold as a supplement DHEA is made from plant chemicals.

Because approximately 90 percent of people with lupus are women between the ages of 15 and 45, the sex hormones as well as one's gender are important keys for understanding and treating this disease.

Estrogens (which produce female sex hormones) most likely contribute to the disease; whereas androgens (hormones that aid the development of certain male sex characteristics)—such as DHEA—probably will offer some protection. Well-documented

studies do suggest this.

There is no definitive test for SLE. For most of my lupus patients, I use a blood test to measure a DHEA sulfate level (most people with lupus have a very low DHEA level). Under my supervision patients may take DHEA supplements until their level is in the upper limits of normal range. A primary-care physician can order this blood test and monitor the DHEA dose until it reaches adequate levels, at which time many symptoms of lupus may be relieved.

The symptoms of SLE range from mild to severe. Most people experience fatigue, rashes, or muscle or joint pain. People with more severe cases of SLE may develop problems in organs such as the heart, kidneys or brain.

Most people with lupus are able to go on with their usual activities. Exercise and adequate rest can be beneficial for controlling it.

Research shows that lupus patients may benefit from a balanced diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin E, vitamin A (beta carotene), selenium and calcium, and a diet that limits calories and undesirable fats such as saturated, hydrogenated, partially hydrogenated and omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acids.

Question: Will antibiotics help relieve joint pains for people with rheumatoid arthritis?

S.O., Los Angeles, California

Answer: The late Dr. Thomas McPherson Brown, a rheumatologist, accumulated a significant amount of evidence before his death

in 1989 showing that a type of bacteria called mycoplasma was at the root of rheumatoid arthritis. He then found that tetracycline, a type of antibiotic, could kill the bacteria. The symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis improved, he discovered, when a low dose of tetracycline was administered for a long period of time.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a relatively common disease of the joints in which the membranes or tissues lining the joints become inflamed. In time, the inflammation can destroy the joint tissues, leading to disability.

The MIRA Trial in the 1990s was a double-blind, randomized placebo study held at six university centers in the United States. Minocycline (of the tetracycline family) was used at a dose of 100 milligrams (mg) twice daily. Fifty-five percent of the patients with rheumatoid arthritis improved.

I have placed patients on Minocin (a brand name for minocycline) at a dose of 100 mg every other day and seen similar results. I much prefer Minocin to minocycline.

Your physician can order laboratory tests to determine if a mycoplasma infection is present by calling Immunosciences Lab at 310-657-1077. For more on rheumatoid arthritis, refer to my booklet *The Bible Cure for Arthritis*.