

Autoimmune Diseases Fast Facts



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for free resources about autoimmune diseases.


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Fast Facts

Autoimmune diseases

- 1** Autoimmune diseases are a broad range of more than 80 related disorders that vary from common to rare. They affect around 5% of people, and are one of the most significant chronic health problems in Australia and New Zealand. Common autoimmune diseases such as thyroiditis, rheumatoid arthritis, and diabetes affect more than 1% of people. Lupus (SLE) affects less than 0.1% of people.
- 2** In autoimmune diseases the immune system produces an inappropriate response against its own cells, tissues and/or organs, resulting in inflammation and damage. Whilst the tendency for autoimmunity may be inherited in some people, factors such as infections and some drugs can play a role in triggering autoimmune diseases.
- 3** Localised autoimmune diseases mainly affect a single organ and/or tissue. However, the effects frequently extend to other body systems and organs.
- 4** Systemic autoimmune diseases can affect many body organs and tissues at the same time. They include rheumatological disease and vasculitis disorders (inflammation of blood vessels). These diseases are often managed by clinical immunology/allergy specialists or rheumatologists.
- 5** Autoimmune diseases are usually diagnosed using a combination of clinical history, blood tests and other investigations such as x-rays. Sometimes a biopsy of affected tissues may be required for diagnosis.
- 6** There are many treatment options, which depend on the stage and type of autoimmune disease. The main aims of treatments are to relieve symptoms, minimise organ/tissue damage, and preserve organ function. Treatment options include:
 - Replacement of end organ functions (such as insulin in diabetes).
 - Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs).
 - Corticosteroid anti-inflammatory medications (such as Prednisolone).
 - Immunosuppressive medications.
 - Therapeutic monoclonals (such as TNF inhibitors).
 - Immunoglobulin replacement therapy (IRT).

More information: www.allergy.org.au/patients/autoimmunity

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