



# AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES

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## IMMUNE SYSTEM DISORDERS

### COST SAVINGS TIPS

- Did you know that going to a pharmacy that offers \$4 generics can actually be less expensive than paying your co-pay for the same medication at a different pharmacy? Check with pharmacies at Kroger, Target, or Giant Eagle for cost saving drugs. These pharmacies also offer some antibiotics free.
- You and your family have free access to a full range of emotional health services through Mercy Employee Assistance Program (EAP). These services may help with job stress; marital or relationship problems; alcohol or drug dependence; legal issues; or financial worries to name a few areas they address. Sessions are completely confidential with professional counselors. Call 419-251-1444 to set up an appointment. Identify yourself as a Local 50 member.

Autoimmunity is the process where the immune system sees the body's own proteins as foreign invaders and begins attacking healthy cells and organs. According to the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA), there are ~100 known autoimmune diseases including type-1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, scleroderma, Sjögren's disease, ulcerative colitis, psoriasis and lupus.

The ability to develop an autoimmune disease is determined by a dominant genetic trait that is very common that may present in families as different

autoimmune diseases within the same family.

Autoimmune diseases are difficult to diagnose, especially in the early stages of the disease. The diagnosis is based on an individual's symptoms, findings from a physical exam, and results of lab tests.

In organ-specific disorders, the autoimmune process is directed mostly against one organ. Examples, with the organ affected, include Hashimoto's thyroiditis (thyroid gland), pernicious anemia (stomach), Addison's disease (adrenal glands), and type 1 diabetes (pancreas).

In non-organ-specific disorders, autoimmune activity is widely spread throughout

the body. Examples include rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE or lupus), and dermatomyositis.

Most autoimmune diseases **cannot be cured**, although much can be done to relieve symptoms and improve quality of life. The treatment of an autoimmune disease depends on the symptoms associated with a specific disease. Treatment for autoimmune diseases may include drugs that suppress the immune system as well as therapies that target specific organs affected. Autoimmune diseases remain among the most poorly understood and poorly recognized of any category of illnesses.

## FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY

A family history should go back about 3 generations. Try to collect details on every direct family member who has died and the cause of their death. Document the medical conditions of all family members, including the age at which they were first diagnosed, their treat-

ment, and if they ever had surgery. Important medical conditions to document include cancer, heart disease, alcoholism, stroke, birth defects, auto immune diseases and any others you are aware of. If your family members come from a different country, make

note of this, as some medical conditions have possible ethnic roots. The more information you gather, the more informed you will be about your medical heritage. You may save your life or the lives of your children.