DIET AND LIFESTYLE IN LUPUS

Reducing Inflammation in SLE and Related Disorders

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In the last few years, the effects of diet and lifestyle in autoimmune disorders have been studied intensively. Read on to learn how simple changes can help.

Environmental Triggers in Lupus

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and related autoimmune diseases are caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. That is, people with certain predisposing genes develop autoimmune disorders when they’re exposed to certain environmental triggers. These environmental factors may be infections, nutritional deficits, chemical toxins such as aspartame and cigarette smoke, stress, or some unsuspected factor.

Regardless of the cause, certain types of diet, particularly those based on foods with a low glycemic index, are known to reduce inflammation and help prevent flares in patients with SLE and related conditions. Studies also show that certain lifestyle factors cause flares and worsen the disease course in SLE.

What to Avoid

Certain environmental triggers known to worsen symptoms in lupus that should be avoided include:

* Aromatic amines present in cleaning agents and hair dyes
* Silicone and silica dust
* Alfalfa sprouts due to their high L-canaivanine content
* Hydrazines found in some mushrooms and in tobacco smoke
* Tartrazines found as preservatives in food dyes such as FD&C yellow *5
* Ultraviolet light, both UVA and UVB
* Excess alcohol

Rest and Exercise

Systemic lupus erythematosus causes reduced energy levels. It’s important to get adequate sleep, optimally 8-9 hours each night, and to pace yourself as much as possible to avoid fatigue. But while rest is important, it’s important not to remain in bed too long, which can worsen symptoms of arthritis.

A regular exercise program is essential for patients with SLE. Aerobic exercises, such as walking, swimming, yoga, or pilates help build endurance and help preserve muscle tone.
and flexibility. A muscle-building program such as light weight training is strongly remained for maintaining muscle mass and strength.

**Stress Reduction**

Stress increases the secretion of the hormones corticotropin and cortisol and directly injures the immune system. The effects of stress on lupus are described in an upcoming article. Measures to combat the effects of stress include light exercise, meditation, and biofeedback.

**Diet**

It’s essential to avoid known or suspected food allergens since they stimulate the immune system, thereby contributing to leaky gut syndrome and worsening symptoms in autoimmune disease. A diet as close to natural as possible, which is low in sugar and saturated fats, is also essential in patients with lupus. If there is a risk for kidney problems or hypertension, a diet low in salt and protein is also recommended. Calorie, protein, and fat restriction reduce formation of the immune complexes that are responsible for most organ damage related to SLE.

People with autoimmune diseases typically have low levels of essential fatty acids and this also contributes to inflammation. Polyunsaturated fatty acids rich in omega-3 oils such as those found in fish oil, flaxseed oil and linseed oil inhibit the inflammatory fatty acid known as arachidonic acid and directly reduce inflammation. Because people with SLE tend to have low levels of both omega-3 and omega-6 oils, fish oil supplements are essential for correcting imbalances.

A diet containing 75 percent of alkalizing foods is also recommended. Alkalizing foods include: most fruits and vegetables, free-range eggs, organic yogurt, nuts and seeds, lean chicken breast, fat-free cottage cheese, green tea, herbal tea, garlic, edible flowers, cinnamon, ginger, miso, and sea salt. Acidifying foods, which should only make up 25 percent of the diet, include most grains, fats and oils, pasta, beef, tuna, lobster, shrimp, turkey, duck, pork, lamb, beer, spirits, beans and legumes, peanuts, and dairy products.

And while some sources report benefits from following a vegetarian diet, most resources feel that a vegetarian diet is too limiting and doesn’t provide adequate protein. The general consensus is that because diets high in saturated fat as well as the amino acids phenyalanine and tyrosine aggravate lupus, a low fat diet and an avoidance of beef and dairy products offer benefits. Supplements essential for correcting the nutrient deficiencies characteristic of SLE are addressed in an upcoming article.

**Resources**

Denise Mann, Diet Linked to Lupus Syndrome, Medicine Net.com, Feb 12, 2001,

Lupus Diet, Arthritis-Symptom.com From the Consumer Health Information Network


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