

the professional HYPOCHONDRIAC

New Lupus Drug Holds Promise



There's good news for those with lupus.

The FDA recently approved Benlysta, the first new treatment for lupus (systemic lupus erythematosus) in 40 years. Benlysta is a drug on the market specifically indicated for the treatment of lupus.

Lupus is an autoimmune condition that occurs when the body's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs. This chronic, inflammatory condition can affect the joints, skin, kidneys, blood cells, heart and lungs.

While the condition can be diagnosed in men or women at any age, it's most commonly found in women of childbearing years. It affects more women than men by a ratio of 9-1.

Symptoms range from mild disease that doesn't require treatment to more moderate disease with frequent flare-ups that can be controlled with over-the-counter NSAIDs, corticosteroids and antimalarial drugs. Relatively few patients have life-threatening lupus and are at risk of major organ failure.

"By and large the vast majority of lupus cases are extremely easy and well managed," says Stephen Soloway, MD, a rheumatologist in Vineland, NJ. "When you tell a patient they have lupus they want to run out and write their will, but that's not the case. The biggest change of life is you must try to avoid the sun, because sun exposure is the one trigger of lupus." Patients must avoid the sun or use immense amounts of sunscreen with SPF of 30 or higher on the face and protect the entire body.

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Dr. Soloway has been prescribing Benlysta for patients with active lupus. "When you're putting patients on Benlysta, that patient has already been on or is on two, three or four drugs," he says. "After six months of treatment you want to diminish the number of drugs they're on. Benlysta will hopefully make it more manageable and allow us to use fewer other drugs. This treatment gets more toward the root cause of lupus rather than merely addressing symptoms."

While it takes six months to know whether a patient is responding to Benlysta, “It looks very encouraging,” says Dr. Soloway. “Benlysta is a giant step in the correct direction for many other drugs and the future treatment of lupus looks bright.”

Symptoms of Lupus

- Joint pain, including the fingers, wrists, shoulders, toes, elbows or knees. Go directly to a rheumatologist, not an orthopedic or primary care doctor.
- Hair loss
- Mouth sores
- Skin rash, most famously rash on the face (“malar rash”)
- Non-cardiac chest pain

For more information, visit Dr. Soloway’s website at <http://www.drsoloway.com/>.