



The Lupus Foundation of Illinois

20 E. Jackson Boulevard, Suite 1150

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Positive Antinuclear Antibody Test

**I Have a
Positive
Antinuclear
Antibody
Test...What
Does That
Mean?**



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Positive Antinuclear Antibody Test... What Does That Mean?

A positive antinuclear antibody blood test means that your immune system (your body's natural defense system against disease) is producing an antibody (a protein) that works against the nucleus of your body's own cells and may or may not be toxic to your body.

The presence of antinuclear antibodies and other autoimmune antibodies in the blood may sometimes be genetic and run in families. This condition is called autoimmunity.

In people with autoimmunity, the antibodies that normally protect the body against invasion of viruses, bacteria, and other infections react against substances in the body's cells or tissues. The immune system still fights off infections, but it may also react vigorously against substances in the body that it normally should not attack.

Lupus Foundation of Illinois

Since 1973, the Lupus Foundation of Illinois (LFI) has worked diligently to inform, educate, and promote awareness and understanding of lupus, and to support those affected by the disease. As the number of people diagnosed with lupus rises each year, the foundation expands to better serve lupus patients, their families and friends, the medical community, and the general public.

The Lupus Foundation of Illinois offers a variety of programs and services to those affected by lupus and to the general public, including free community educational meetings; numerous support groups held throughout the state; a website providing up-to-date information on many issues related to lupus; regular newsletters reporting cutting-edge developments in the treatment of the disease; a toll-free information and referral line, providing timely and accurate responses to hundreds of inquiries each year; a trained Speakers Bureau; a variety of public awareness and advocacy initiatives; and the "Living with Lupus" Grant Program designed to assist Illinois lupus patients with financial needs not covered by other available resources.



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- Paleness from anemia
- Swelling of the feet
- Pain in the chest on deep breathing
- Sun sensitivity leading to a rash
- Extensive hair loss
- Raynaud's phenomenon (fingers turn white or blue when exposed to cold)
- Neurological problems, including confusion and seizures
- Ulcers in the mouth or nose for more than a few days at a time

A positive antinuclear antibody test is sometimes associated with the presence of other types of antibodies in your blood in a variety of conditions, autoimmune illnesses, in which your immune system actively participates in causing inflammation of your body tissues.

These autoimmune illnesses include lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, Sjogren's syndrome, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, dermatomyositis, and vasculitis. These conditions may involve your muscles, bones, skin, and internal organs.

However, having antibodies in your blood without objective physical evidence of disease does not mean you have one these illnesses.

Generally speaking, your doctor should be able to find objective physical evidence of lupus or other

Symptoms Used to Diagnose Lupus

autoimmune illnesses before he or she can diagnose you with one of these diseases. Typical physical findings include swelling of your joints, protein in your urine, fluid around your lungs or heart, and a rash. Subjective symptoms, such as pain and fatigue, are common reasons for you to seek medical help, but having antinuclear antibodies does not necessarily mean that those symptoms are due to an illness involving your immune system.

All autoimmune illnesses are treatable. The first step is a proper diagnosis by a specialist physician, such as a rheumatologist. The physician needs to carefully evaluate an individual's physical findings and subjective symptoms along with laboratory results.

The American College of Rheumatology has developed a list of symptoms used by physicians to diagnose lupus. Self-diagnosis is discouraged because many people have symptoms without the necessary medical evidence. Other conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, may share similar symptoms. Additionally, laboratory tests and tissue biopsies are sometimes required to make a specific diagnosis.

The symptoms of lupus are:

- Achy and/or swollen joints
- Fever higher than 100 F for an extended period of time
- Inexplicable fatigue
- Skin rashes, such as butterfly-shaped rash over the face, with the wings appearing over the cheeks and the body over the nose