

## What is autoimmune Disease?

A healthy immune system defends the body against disease and infection. An autoimmune disease results when our body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells, tissues, and organs because it can't tell the difference between your cells and bacteria or viruses. Ultimately this decreases the body's ability to fight invaders, causing vulnerability to infections, and causing other complications too.

## Why does the immune system attack our own bodies?

We don't know what exactly triggers an autoimmune disease to develop, but some people are more likely to develop an autoimmune disease than others. Most autoimmune diseases are lifelong, but with careful management or lifestyle changes, people can still live long and healthy lives.

## What types of autoimmune diseases are there?

There are more than 100 autoimmune diseases. These can be split into the following groups:



### Blood

Where your immune system can attack the blood or blood vessels e.g. vasculitis, type 1 diabetes



### Digestive

Where the immune system attacks parts of the gastrointestinal tract e.g. inflammatory bowel disease, coeliac disease



### Endocrine

Where the immune system attacks specific cells in one or more of the organs e.g. Graves' disease



### Joint

Where inflammation can cause damage to joints and connective tissues e.g. rheumatoid arthritis



### Nervous System

Where the immune system attacks cells in the brain, spinal cord, or peripheral nerves e.g. Guillain-Barre syndrome



### Skin

Where the immune system attacks tissues that line the body's organs, including the skin e.g. psoriasis

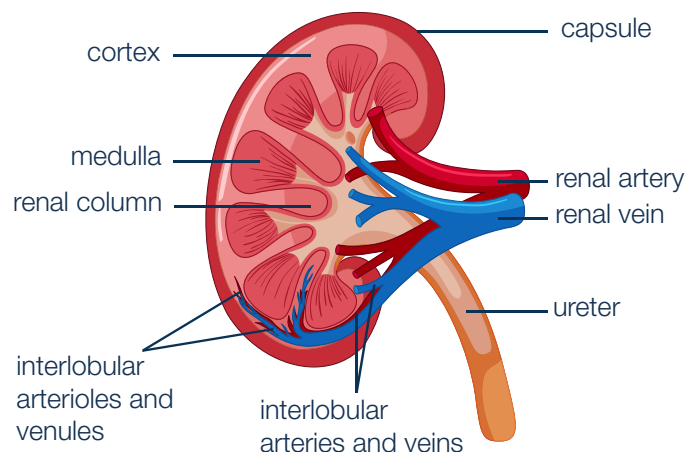


### Other

e.g. Lupus nephritis, where your immune system attacks the kidneys, particularly the tiny filtering units within the kidneys stopping them working as well as they should

## How will my autoimmune disease impact my kidneys?

Some autoimmune diseases can damage blood vessels going to and from the kidneys impacting in and outflow of blood, causing inflammation of the kidneys' filtration units resulting in chronic kidney damage. This results in loss of protein and sometimes blood in your urine and ineffective filtration causing a build-up of toxic waste products in your blood.



## How will my autoimmune disease impact my day-to-day lifestyle? How can I manage this?

Autoimmune diseases target many parts of the body including joints; skin; muscles; and all our organs. Some patients may have only joint pain whereas others may have a variety of illnesses. It is important to discuss your condition with your treating team to better understand your symptoms which may include fatigue; pain; and weakness. The medicines we use to control autoimmune diseases themselves may make you feel unwell. Please discuss these with your doctor and work through ways to adjust your medicines. It is important to use all your medication at the correct time and manner.



Fatigue (tiredness)



Pain



Weakness



Medicine



## Who is the best person to guide me on this?

Seek support from your appropriate medical specialist – if you're unsure, ask your overseeing medical team.

For a comprehensive list of references and contributors involved in the creation of this material, please refer to the included reference sheet.