Could You Have Fibromyalgia and Lupus?

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A Look at Fibromyalgia and Lupus

Because lupus and fibromyalgia share some symptoms, it is not always easy for doctors to distinguish between the two. To make things more complicated, it is also possible a person could have both conditions simultaneously.

Comparing Fibromyalgia and Lupus

Fibromyalgia usually brings fatigue and muscle pain and soreness in multiple regions (i.e. neck, spine, shoulders, hips). These symptoms are typically aggravated by lack of sleep.

Stomach aches, headaches, numbness and tingling in the hands and feet are also associated with fibromyalgia. While fatigue and muscle pain are also symptoms of lupus, these complaints are usually accompanied by a rash on the face, across cheeks and nose, which is aggravated by sunlight.

Kidney problems, difficulty breathing and damage to other organs and tissues are more likely to be associated with lupus

A physical examination will help a doctor differentiate between these two conditions. In fibromyalgia, the joints are sore, but the range of motion is normal and they are usually not swollen.

With lupus, the joints are painful, stiff, swollen and have limited range of motion. After doing a physical examination, as well as getting a detailed account of your medical history, your doctor will have a good idea about your condition, but will order lab tests to confirm the diagnosis.

Lab tests will include a blood test to evaluate ANA (antinuclear antibody), which is found in lupus patients as well as in other rheumatologic conditions like RA, scleroderma or Sjogren's disease. If the levels of ANA are positive, more lab tests will follow to confirm lupus. On the other hand, if a person has fibromyalgia, these test results will come back normal.

Getting the right diagnosis is crucial, since the treatments for fibromyalgia and lupus are very different. Drugs such as corticosteroids or disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (i.e. methotrexate) are used for the management of lupus, where fibromyalgia is treated with antidepressants, muscle relaxants, physical therapy and psychological counseling.

Other considerations

If you suffer from fibromyalgia and suspect you also have lupus or another condition, talk to your doctor and ask for further lab tests and investigations. You may also want to consider working with a dietician and a physical therapist, as diet and fitness plans can help improve your symptoms (whether you suffer from fibromyalgia, lupus or both).

It is best to work out in the morning or early afternoon to get more energy during the day, sleep better at night, strengthen your muscles and reduce the pain. Avoid highly processed foods and red meat, while adding more fresh fruits and vegetables, legumes, lean meat and fish, whole grains, healthy oils (i.e. olive oil), nuts and seeds to your diet.