

Autoimmunity plays a role in more than 80 diseases. Following are brief descriptions of some of the many diseases in which autoimmunity may be involved.

Alopecia areata—A disorder in which the immune system attacks the hair follicles, causing loss of hair on the scalp, face, and other parts of the body.

Ankylosing spondylitis—A rheumatic disease that causes inflamed joints in the spine and sacroiliac (the joints that connect the spine and the pelvis) and, in some people, inflamed eyes and heart valves.

Arthritis—A general term for more than 100 different diseases that affect the joints. Many forms of arthritis and related conditions are believed to have an autoimmune component.

Autoimmune hemolytic anemia—A condition in which immune system proteins attack the red blood cells, resulting in fewer of these oxygen-transporting cells.

Autoimmune hepatitis—A disease in which the body's immune system attacks liver cells, causing inflammation. If not stopped, inflammation can lead to cirrhosis (scarring and hardening) of the liver and eventually liver failure.

Behçet's disease—A condition characterized by sores in the mouth and on the genitals and by inflammation in parts of the eye. In some people, the disease also results in inflammation of the joints, digestive tract, brain, and spinal cord.

Crohn's disease—An inflammatory disease of the small intestine or colon that causes diarrhea, cramps, and excessive weight loss.

Dermatomyositis—A rare autoimmune disease that causes patchy red rashes around the knuckles, eyes, and other parts of the body along with chronic inflammation of the muscles. It may occur along with other autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus.

Diabetes mellitus, type 1—A condition in which the immune system destroys insulin-producing cells of the pancreas, making it impossible for the body to use glucose (blood sugar) for energy. Type 1 diabetes usually occurs in children and young adults.

Glomerulonephritis—Inflammation of the kidney's tiny filtering units, which in severe cases can lead to kidney failure.

Graves' disease—An autoimmune disease of the thyroid gland that results in the overproduction of thyroid hormone. This causes such symptoms as nervousness, heat intolerance, heart palpitations, and unexplained weight loss.

Guillain-Barré syndrome—A disorder in which the body's immune system attacks part of the nervous system, leading to numb, weak limbs and, in severe cases, paralysis.

Inflammatory bowel disease—The general name for diseases that cause inflammation in the intestine, the most common of which are ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

Lupus nephritis—Damaging inflammation of the kidneys that can occur in people with lupus. If not controlled, it may lead to total kidney failure.

Multiple sclerosis—A disease in which the immune system attacks the protective coating called myelin around the nerves. The damage affects the brain and/or spinal cord and interferes with the nerve pathways, causing muscular weakness, loss of coordination, and visual and speech problems.

Myasthenia gravis—A disease in which the immune system attacks the nerves and muscles in the neck, causing weakness and problems with seeing, chewing, and/or talking.

Myocarditis—Inflamed and degenerating muscle tissue of the heart that can cause chest pain and shortness of breath. This can lead to congestive heart failure

Pemphigus/pemphigoid—An autoimmune disease of the skin characterized by itching and blisters.

Pernicious anemia—A deficiency of the oxygen-carrying red blood cells that often occurs in people with autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland.

Polyarteritis nodosa—An autoimmune disease that causes inflammation of the small and medium-sized arteries. This leads to problems in the muscles, joints, intestines, nerves, kidney , and skin.

Polymyositis—A rare autoimmune disease characterized by inflamed and tender muscles throughout the body , particularly those of the shoulder and hip girdles.

Primary biliary cirrhosis—A disease that slowly destroys the bile ducts in the liver. When the ducts are damaged, bile (a substance that helps digest fat) builds up in the liver and damages liver tissue.

Psoriasis—A chronic skin disease that occurs when cells in the outer layer of the skin reproduce faster than normal and pile up on the skin's surface. This results in scaling and inflammation. An estimated 10 to 30 percent of people with psoriasis develop an associated arthritis called psoriatic arthritis.

Rheumatic fever—A disease that can occur following untreated streptococcus (strep) infection. It most often affects children, causing painful, inflamed joints and, in some cases, permanent damage to heart valves.

Rheumatoid arthritis—A disease in which the immune system is believed to attack the linings of the joints. This results in joint pain, stiffness, swelling, and destruction.

Sarcoidosis—A disease characterized by granulomas (small growths of blood vessels, cells, and connective tissue) that can lead to problems in the skin, lungs, eyes, joints, and muscles.

Scleroderma—An autoimmune disease characterized by abnormal growth of connective tissue in the skin and blood vessels. In more severe forms, connective tissue can build up in the kidneys, lungs, heart, and gastrointestinal tract, leading in some cases to organ failure.

Sjögren's syndrome—A condition in which the immune system targets the body's moisture-producing glands, leading to dryness of the eyes, mouth, and other body tissues.

Systemic lupus erythematosus—An autoimmune disease, primarily of young women, that can affect many parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels, and brain.

Thyroiditis—An inflammation of the thyroid gland that causes the gland to become underactive. This results in symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, weight gain, cold intolerance, and muscle aches.

Ulcerative colitis—A disease that causes ulcers in the top layers of the lining of the large intestine. This leads to abdominal pain and diarrhea.

Uveitis—The inflammation of structures of the inner eye, including the iris (the colored tissue that holds the lens of the eye) and the choroid plexus (a network of blood vessels around the eyeball). Uveitis occurs with some rheumatic diseases, including ankylosing spondylitis and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

Vitiligo—A disorder in which the immune system destroys pigment-making cells called melanocytes. This results in white patches of skin on different parts of the body .

Wegener's granulomatosis—An autoimmune disease that damages the small and medium-sized blood vessels throughout the body , resulting in disease in the lungs, upper respiratory tract, and kidneys.

Please note that because the specific causes of many diseases are unknown, there is debate among scientists about whether some of these are truly autoimmune diseases. Your own doctor may classify some of these diseases differently.

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