What Research Says About Lupus in Minorities

by BRENDA VANTA

Lupus in Minorities

Lupus is one of those medical conditions that discriminates against gender (90 percent of lupus sufferers are women) and also against certain ethnic groups — particularly African-American, Latina and Native American women.

LUMINA Study

One of the largest studies assessing lupus and ethnicity, called *Lupus in Minorities – Nature versus Nurture* (LUMINA), started in 1993 and lasted for 10 years. Researchers looked at disability, damage to various organs, disease activity and death rate in female lupus sufferers. They gathered the following findings:

- African-American women are three times more likely to develop lupus and experience severe symptoms as compared with Caucasian women.
- Asian-American women and Latinas are twice as likely to develop lupus than Caucasian women.
- African-American women and Latinas diagnosed with lupus are more likely to develop the condition earlier in life and suffer from more complications (i.e. kidney problems) compared with Caucasians.
- African-Americans have higher frequency of neurological problems, including seizures with lupus, bleeding and stroke, while Latinas are more likely to develop heart diseases and rapid progression to kidney failures.

Possible Explanations

The exact cause of lupus is not known for sure. LUMINA researchers suggest that the development of lupus arises from the interaction between genetic and non-genetic factors (environment, social, economic, demographic, cultural and behavioral).

Specifically, this study found that the lack of private insurance, acute onset of lupus, and genetics correlated with more symptoms and more complications. Furthermore, poverty and damage to major organs increased the risk of death.

Reduce the Risk of Complications

Being a woman of color doesn't mean lupus complications are unavoidable, there are precautions you can take:

- **See your doctor regularly** – The better is this condition monitored, the more effectively it can be treated.
- **Follow your treatment plan** – Don't stray from the plan recommended by your doctor, and do not change dose or medications on your own. Your doctor can find alternate medications if you experience adverse reactions from a drug.
- **Reduce sun exposure** – Time in the sun should be restricted because UV rays affect the skin and can

trigger other symptoms of lupus as well.

- **Adopt a healthy lifestyle** – Stay active and adopt a healthy diet. Listen to your body, be sure to get enough rest, and avoid stress. Staying as healthy as you can will improve your symptoms, and save you money by avoiding extra medical costs from hospital stays and additional meds.
- **Stay updated** – Learn as much as you can about lupus. This is the best way to take a proactive role in your health.