Tips for Managing Photosensitivity to Fluorescent Lighting

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Lupus and Fluorescent Lights

Many people with lupus are photosensitive, which means they are more easily affected by ultraviolet (UV) rays, the invisible radiation emitted from the sun and indoor lighting, such as fluorescent bulbs. UV exposure can trigger a lupus rash, as well as joint pain and fatigue. So, what exactly is the deal with lupus and fluorescent lights? Read on to learn more.

When it comes to lupus and fluorescent lights, UV light creates an autoimmune response due to a process called “apoptosis,” which comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “falling off.” Apoptosis is the programmed skin cell death that happens when you are exposed to UV light, which is abnormally prolonged in someone with an autoimmune disease.

The longer these dead skin cells stick around, an inflammatory response in your body occurs, causing lupus flares. Protecting your skin from UV light, both indoors and outdoors, is an important way you can help minimize this response.

Sun Photosensitivity

Avoiding the sun entirely would be detrimental to our health, but we can be wise about the time we choose to spend outside. UV sunlight is at its most intense from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., so ensure your skin is protected and that shade is readily available if you need to be outside.

Check the UV index in your area every day. The amount of UV light reaching the ground depends on the time of day, the time of year, elevation, and cloud cover.

Remember, 80% of the sun’s ultraviolet rays can penetrate through fog, mist, and clouds, and can be reflected off water, sand, snow, and concrete. Sun protection should happen year-round!

Artificial Light Photosensitivity

Prior to the invention of the light bulb, the sun, moon, stars, and fire illuminated the world. Human beings have a biological clock, also called the circadian rhythm, which tells us when it is time to wake and sleep. The circadian rhythm is largely dependent on the light we are exposed to.

In the modern world, unnatural light surrounds us 24 hours a day. Fluorescent lighting can emit UV radiation, which can cause harmful side effects, even without lupus photosensitivity.

It can affect sleep and hormone production, as well as cause migraines, anxiety, and stress.

For photosensitive individuals with lupus, exposure to fluorescent light can induce lupus symptoms that could

affect your ability to work or complete daily tasks. It's important to monitor how much fluorescent light exposure you are getting and how your body is reacting to it.

Seek Alternative Lighting

If you have UV-emitting fluorescent lights in your office or home, try replacing them with LED tubes, which have close to no UV emissions.

According to the Lupus Foundation of America, "Some people with lupus have reported fewer flares when using the newer Light Emitting Diode (LED) lighting; however, there is insufficient research at this time to draw any definitive conclusions."

If a LED tubes are not possible, light filters could be the solution you are looking for. Light filters are placed over the fluorescent lights, filtering out the UV and converting it to full spectrum lighting.

You can also buy special lamps that emit natural, full spectrum light without the UV rays.

Skip the Fake Tan

Having a nice tan year-round, for a special occasion, or that tropical vacation is something many of us desire, but tanning beds are not a safe alternative to the sun. Tanning lamps emit harmful UVA and UVB rays and could cause a lupus flare.

Air Dry Your Nails

Have you ever felt unwell after treating yourself to a manicure?

UV lamps are often used in the salon to dry nail polish. If you know you are extremely photosensitive, apply sunscreen before using these lamps or let your nails air dry instead.

Use Your Full Photosensitivity Tool Kit

In addition to the above fluorescent lighting tips, do not forget that you can increase your UV armor with the same strategies you use for sun protection. Use sunscreen daily and wear tightly woven clothes.

If you are extremely sensitive, you can consider wearing sunglasses inside or ask your optometrist about tinted prescription glasses.

Photosensitivity Awareness Is Key

Just as each person's lupus manifests differently, the way you manage UV sensitivity will be unique to your particular set of symptoms. Find out what combination works for you and make photosensitivity protection a daily habit.

The more we can do to preserve and maximize our energy means more time where we can enjoy life, indoors and out!