SLE is more common in women than in men

People living with lupus are prone to depression

New Delhi, 13 October 2017: Statistics place the prevalence of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) in India at 30 per million people. Women are affected more frequently than men (10:1). SLE is a frequently overlooked disease, primarily due to lack of awareness, with the average diagnostic delay standing at almost 4 years.

A chronic disease, SLE is an autoimmune disease with phases of active disease when the symptoms worsen and phases of remission when the disease is quiet or has minimal symptoms. It is the most common form of lupus. The disease also involves the heart, lungs, kidneys, and brain and can be life threatening. People living with lupus are prone to depression.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, “SLE is an autoimmune disease. The immune system is designed to fight off infectious agents, bacteria, and foreign microbes. One of the ways that the immune system fights infections is by producing antibodies that bind to the microbes. People with lupus produce abnormal antibodies called ‘autoantibodies’ in their blood, which attack the body’s own healthy tissues and organs rather than foreign infectious agents. While the exact reason for abnormal autoimmunity is unknown, it could be a mix of genes and environmental factors. Sunlight, infections and certain medications such as anti-seizure drugs are known to trigger SLE.”

The symptoms of lupus can vary over time but the common symptoms include fatigue, joint pain and swelling, headaches, a butterfly-shaped rash over the cheeks and nose, skin rashes, hair loss, anemia, increased tendency to form blood clots and poor circulation in fingers and toes, which turn white or blue when cold, known as Raynaud’s phenomenon.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “There is no cure for SLE. However, treatment can help ease or control the symptoms and can vary depending on the severity. The common treatment options include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) for joint pain and stiffness,
corticosteroid creams for rashes, antimalarial drugs for skin and joint problems, oral corticosteroids and immunosuppressant drugs to minimize immune response.”

Some tips to combat SLE symptoms include the following.

- Maintain a good doctor-patient relationship. It is also important to get adequate family support.
- Take all medications as advised. Visit your physician regularly and get involved in your care.
- Stay active as this will help in keeping the joints flexible and prevent cardiovascular complications.
- Avoid excessive sun exposure as the ultraviolet rays can cause the skin rash to flare up.
- Avoid smoking and try to minimize stress and fatigue.
- Maintain normal body weight and bone density.
- Young women with lupus should time pregnancies for periods when lupus activity is low. Pregnancies must be carefully monitored and certain medications should be avoided.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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