

# UNDERSTANDING AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES IN WOMEN

Autoimmune diseases occur when the body's immune system, which normally protects against infections and harmful invaders, mistakenly attacks healthy tissues and organs. These conditions can affect nearly every part of the body, including the joints, skin, thyroid, digestive system, nervous system, and other vital organs.

While autoimmune diseases can affect anyone, women account for the majority of cases worldwide. Greater awareness of the signs, risk factors, and available treatments can support earlier diagnosis and better health outcomes.

Awareness matters. Early recognition and timely medical attention can make a significant difference in managing autoimmune conditions and improving quality of life.

## Key Evidence Highlights:



More than **100** autoimmune diseases have been identified.



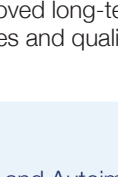
Approximately **75-80%** of individuals diagnosed with autoimmune diseases are women.



Autoimmune diseases collectively affect **millions** of people worldwide and are among the leading causes of chronic illness in women.



Biological sex differences, particularly involving X-chromosome genetics and hormonal influences, are recognised contributors to the higher prevalence of autoimmune diseases in women.



Early diagnosis and appropriate disease management are associated with improved long-term health outcomes and quality of life.

**Read more:** [Women and Autoimmune Diseases - PMC](#)

## Common autoimmune diseases affecting women include:



**Lupus**  
(Systemic Lupus Erythematosus)



**Rheumatoid Arthritis**



**Multiple Sclerosis**



**Hashimoto's Thyroiditis**



**Graves' Disease**



**Sjögren's Syndrome**



**Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis**



**Celiac Disease**

## Why are women more affected?

Although researchers continue to study the causes of autoimmune diseases, several factors are believed to contribute to their higher prevalence in women.

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### Genetics

Women have two X chromosomes, which contain numerous genes involved in immune system regulation. Variations in these genes may increase susceptibility to autoimmune conditions.

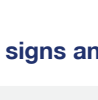
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### Hormonal Influences

Female hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone play important roles in immune function. Changes in hormone levels during menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause may influence disease development and symptom severity.

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### Environmental Triggers

Genetic predisposition alone does not explain autoimmune disease. Environmental factors such as infections, smoking, air pollution, stress, ultraviolet (UV) exposure, dietary factors, and certain medications may contribute to triggering autoimmune responses in susceptible individuals.

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### Stronger Immune Responses

Women generally have more robust immune responses than men. While this may improve protection against some infections, it can also increase the likelihood of the immune system becoming overactive.

## Recognise your warning signs:

Autoimmune diseases can be difficult to diagnose because symptoms often mimic those of other health conditions and may develop gradually:

### Common signs and symptoms may include:

- Persistent fatigue or exhaustion
- Joint pain, swelling, or stiffness
- Recurrent skin rashes
- Hair thinning or hair loss
- Unexplained fever
- Muscle weakness
- Digestive disturbances or abdominal pain
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Dry eyes or dry mouth
- Unexplained weight changes
- Sensitivity to sunlight
- Brain fog, memory, or concentration difficulties



**Remember:** Having one or more of these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have an autoimmune disease. If symptoms persist, worsen, or interfere with daily activities, consult a healthcare professional for evaluation.

## Women's Health Matters

Autoimmune diseases often intersect with key stages of a woman's life, influencing health, wellbeing, and disease management.



### Pregnancy and Family Planning:

Autoimmune diseases can behave differently during and after pregnancy. While some conditions may improve during pregnancy, others may become more active following childbirth. Careful planning and close collaboration with healthcare providers can help support healthy outcomes for both mother and baby.



### Postpartum Health:

The months after childbirth bring significant hormonal and immune system changes. These changes may trigger symptom flare-ups or contribute to the first onset of certain autoimmune conditions.



### Menopause:

Hormonal changes during menopause can affect disease activity, symptom patterns, bone health, and cardiovascular risk. Regular monitoring and ongoing care can help women navigate this transition more effectively.



### Mental and Emotional Wellbeing:

Living with a chronic autoimmune condition can impact emotional health and may increase the risk of stress, anxiety, or depression. Seeking support from healthcare professionals, family, friends, or support groups can play an important role in overall wellbeing.



### Talk to Your Healthcare Provider:

If you are living with an autoimmune disease, discussing pregnancy planning, medication safety, vaccinations, and any new or changing symptoms with your healthcare provider.

## Small Steps for Better Health

### Listen to Your Body:

Pay attention to persistent or unusual symptoms and seek medical advice when something does not feel right.

### Know Your Family History:

Some autoimmune diseases have a genetic component and may occur more frequently among family members. Understanding your family history can help identify potential risk factors.

### Stay Up to Date with Regular Health Checks:

Routine medical evaluations can support early detection, timely intervention, and effective disease management.

### Prioritise Healthy Lifestyle Habits

- Get enough quality sleep
- Stay physically active
- Follow a balanced, nutritious diet
- Manage stress through healthy coping strategies
- Avoid smoking and tobacco products

### Avoid Self-Diagnosis

Many autoimmune disease symptoms overlap with other medical conditions. Accurate diagnosis requires professional evaluation, including appropriate laboratory testing and assessment of your medical history.



**Early recognition,** timely medical assessment, and ongoing care can help women manage autoimmune diseases more effectively and maintain a healthy, active, and fulfilling life.

## How Daman Supports Members with Autoimmune Diseases

Living with an autoimmune disease often requires ongoing medical care, regular monitoring, and a personalised treatment plan. Through Daman's health coverage plans, members can access:



**healthcare providers**



**specialist consultations**



**diagnostic services**



**medically necessary treatments**

In accordance with their policy benefits and coverage terms. Early diagnosis, adherence to treatment plans, and regular follow-up with healthcare professionals can help improve disease control and support long-term health outcomes.

Daman encourages members experiencing persistent symptoms to seek medical advice promptly and to work closely with their healthcare team to develop an appropriate care plan tailored to their individual needs. By supporting access to preventive care, disease management services, and coordinated treatment pathways, Daman aims to help members achieve better health and quality of life.

This newsletter is intended for educational purposes only and does not replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a qualified healthcare professional regarding any health concerns.

[Read More](#)

[Autoimmune Diseases | NIAID: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#)

<https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/conditions/autoimmune>

<https://medlineplus.gov/autoimmunedisorders.html>

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/autoimmune-diseases>

<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/autoimmune-diseases.html>

<https://autoimmune.org>

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