

## Stress management helps fight chronic diseases such as Lupus

### *Benefits of stress management and Lupus treatment*

- Lupus is an autoimmune disease affecting more than 5 million people around the world, and makes the immune system attack the body's cells and tissue as if they were enemies.
- It particularly affects women of fertile age between 15 and 44 years old.
- A study conducted at the University of Granada (Universidad de Granada) shows that reducing stress in people suffering from lupus also decreases some symptoms of this disease such as inexplicable loss of weight, feeling of fatigue, continuous fever or pain and inflammation in joints.
- Patients who received psychological therapy significantly reduced their levels of stress, anxiety and depression, achieving even lower levels than those of the general population.

C@MPUS DIGITAL Lupus is an autoimmune disease which produces antibodies causing injuries to the body's cells and tissue. It makes the immune system go out of control and the organism attack healthy cells instead of the germs on them. This pathology, which affects more than 5 million people around the world, is more developed in women of fertile age between 15 and 44 years old.

A study conducted in the Department of Medicine at the University of Granada determined that daily stress (which occurs in circumstances of little importance but of high frequency) could exacerbate the symptoms of patients suffering from lupus. In other words, controlling the stress level of those suffering from this disease allows the determination of its negative effects, such as inexplicable loss of weight, feeling of fatigue,

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continuous fever or pain and inflammation in joints.

This study, carried out by Dr. Nuria Navarrete Navarrete and led by researchers Juan Jiménez Alonso and María Isabel Peralta Ramírez, aimed to check the effects of stress treatment in patients suffering from lupus and with high levels of stress. A team of psychologists from the University of Granada applied a therapy to fight stress in a group of 45 patients suffering from lupus to teach them how to manage their stress to reduce the negative effects of this disease. Results showed that patients who received psychological therapy significantly reduced their levels of stress, anxiety and depression, achieving levels even lower than those of the general population. Furthermore, they significantly improved their quality of life both at a physical and psychological level and presented fewer skin and muscular skeletal symptoms, which usually appear in patients suffering from lupus.

### Daily stress management

Nuria Navarrete explains that lupus is a chronic disease whose course is unpredictable. Patients alternate periods of clinical stability with others in which there are symptoms and signs showing that the disease is active. In addition, there are certain factors such as stress which may cause crisis and, therefore, worsen the prognosis of the disease.

Daily stress is very common in patients suffering from lupus. Apart from the usual circumstances which produce anxiety in a healthy population, other effects include knowing that your body suffers from a chronic disease which is controllable but incurable and of uncertain prognosis that requires chronic treatment (in some cases for the rest of their life) and which have important secondary effects.

The results of this study highlighted the importance of dealing appropriately with patients suffering from lupus and, by extension, from other chronic diseases. "According to our results, attention on other psychological aspects is essential to achieve an effective global treatment of the patient", says Navarrete. In other words, the treatment of daily stress, together with the usual pharmacological treatment, is a useful weapon when treating patients suffering from lupus. "We think that this treatment could be useful from the moment in which the disease is diagnosed, as patients may require help to manage their stress and minimise its negative effects," says researcher Navarrete.

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