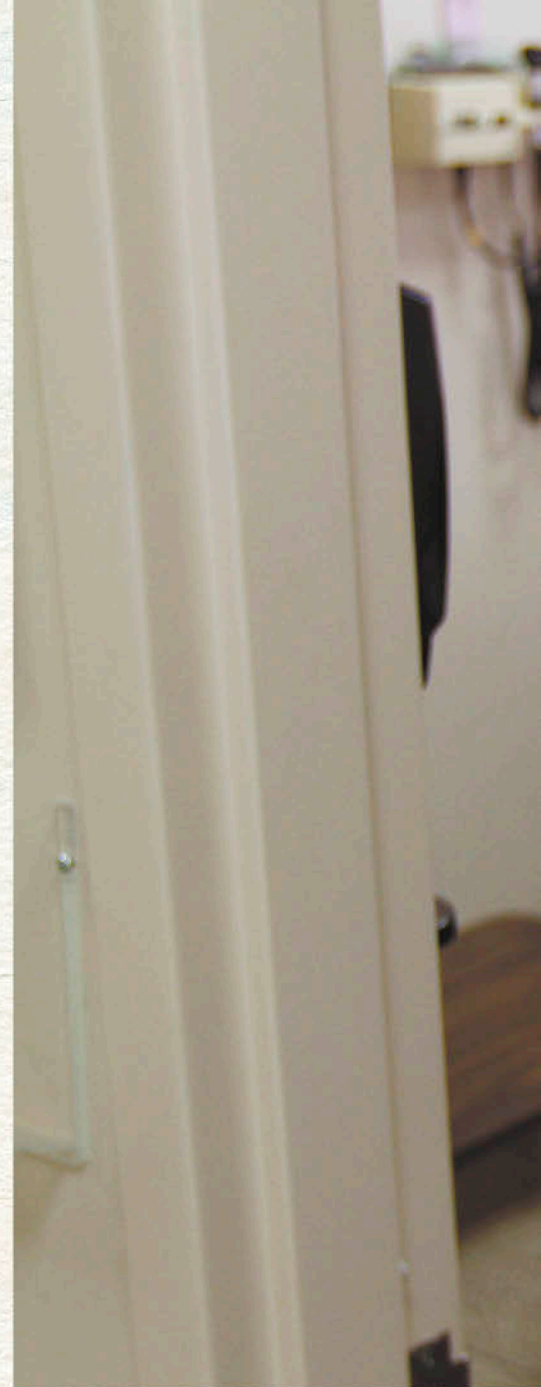


The Environment and Lupus: Is There a Connection?



It is a disease with no known beginning, no definite path and no known cure. In fact, it may take years to even be properly diagnosed. It can strike virtually any organ in the body, from the skin on in.

It strikes more women than men, and more people of color than whites. Its effect on the human body can range from a mild skin rash to a fatal heart attack.

The age group most at risk – from 18 to 34 – is the group least aware of it, with 72 percent who have either never heard of it or know little about it, according to a recent survey.

The Lupus Foundation of America gave it a trademarked name – The Cruel Mystery.

It is lupus, which causes the body's immune system to turn on itself, unable to distinguish healthy tissue from foreign invaders. Slowly, however, lupus is yielding clues as to its origins, and

rheumatologist Diane Kamen, MD, MS, associate professor of medicine, is patiently putting the pieces together.

And patience will be vital to this endeavor.

“It can present so many different ways in so many different people,” she says. “It’s more common than people think. It’s just difficult to diagnose in many cases.”

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) is the most common form of lupus, accounting for about 70 percent of all lupus cases. Other forms are cutaneous lupus, affecting only the skin; drug-induced lupus, caused by certain medications; and neonatal lupus, a rare form affecting infants whose mothers have certain autoantibodies.

The Lupus Foundation of America estimates that 1.5 million Americans have some form of the disease. Worldwide, the estimate is 5 million. Due to its perplexing nature, it is difficult to determine how many new cases there are annually, or, for that matter, how many deaths. Some of the more notable figures who