

Positive Antinuclear Antibody Test

I Have a Positive Antinuclear Antibody Test...What Does That Mean?

A Patient's Guide



Lupus Society of Illinois

525 W. Monroe Street, Suite 900
Chicago, Illinois 60661

Robert S. Katz, M.D.
Professor of Medicine

Rush University Medical Center
Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Positive Antinuclear Antibody Test... What Does That Mean?

An antinuclear antibody test (ANA) is a blood test that determines if your body is producing a protein called an antibody. Antibodies are created by the immune system, the body's natural defense against disease. A positive ANA means that your immune system is producing an antibody that works against the nuclei of your body's own cells.

The presence of antinuclear antibodies and other autoimmune antibodies in the blood is called autoimmunity and may sometimes run in families.

For people with autoimmunity, the antibodies that normally protect the body against invasions like viruses, bacteria, and infections react against substances in the body's healthy cells or tissues instead. The immune system still fights off infections but may also vigorously react against healthy substances in the body that it normally would not attack.

A positive ANA is sometimes associated with the presence of other types of antibodies in your blood in a variety of conditions or autoimmune illnesses in which your immune system actively participates in causing inflammation of your body's tissues.

These autoimmune illnesses may involve your muscles, bones, skin, and internal organs and include: lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, Sjogren's syndrome, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, dermatomyositis, and vasculitis.

However, it's important to realize that a positive ANA does not mean you have one of these illnesses. Objective physical evidence of disease as well as other tests are necessary. Your doctor should be able to determine evidence of lupus or other autoimmune illnesses in order to find an accurate diagnosis.

Objective physical evidence of disease includes swelling of your joints, protein in your urine, fluid around your lungs or heart, and a rash.

Subjective symptoms, such as pain and fatigue, are common reasons to seek medical help. Although these symptoms, combined with a positive ANA do not mean those symptoms are due to an illness involving your immune system.

All autoimmune illnesses are treatable. The first step is a proper diagnosis by a specialist physician, such as a rheumatologist. The physician needs to carefully evaluate an individual's physical findings and subjective symptoms along with laboratory results, including the ANA.

Symptoms Used to Diagnose Lupus

The American College of Rheumatology has developed a list of symptoms used by physicians to diagnose lupus.

Self-diagnosis is discouraged because many people have symptoms without the necessary medical evidence: however, understanding the symptoms of lupus is helpful.

Other conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, may share symptoms. Additionally, laboratory tests and tissue biopsies are sometimes required to make a specific diagnosis.

The symptoms of lupus are:

- ☐ Achy and/or swollen joints
- ☐ Fever higher than 100° F for an extended period of time
- ☐ Inexplicable fatigue

- ☐ Skin rashes, such as butterfly-shaped rash over the face, with the wings appearing over the cheeks and the body over the nose
- ☐ Paleness from anemia
- ☐ Swelling of the feet
- ☐ Pain in the chest on deep breathing
- ☐ Sun sensitivity leading to a rash
- ☐ Extensive hair loss
- ☐ Raynaud's phenomenon (fingers turn white or blue when exposed to cold)
- ☐ Neurological problems, including confusion and seizures
- ☐ Ulcers in the mouth or nose for more than a few days at a time

If you have questions about lupus symptoms or want more information on the disease, contact the Lupus Society of Illinois.

Lupus Society of Illinois

The Lupus Society of Illinois (LSI), formed in 1973, is the Midwest's leading non-profit health organization dedicated to finding the causes and cure for lupus. The LSI's mission is to promote lupus awareness and complement the work of health care professionals by providing personalized resources for the lupus community while supporting research.

The LSI is the only organization in Illinois committed to assisting lupus patients and their families cope with this devastating disease. Programs and services include:

- Patient education programs and materials
- Referrals to physicians, community services, resources, and assistance
- Health educators/navigators available to answer questions and provide medically sound information about lupus
- Information and updates from local and international lupus medical experts
- Local events and support groups
- Newsletters and alerts
- Living with Lupus grant provides financial assistance for a lupus-related expense to qualifying applicants

LSI's programs and services are accessible via phone, online and in-person. The Lupus Society of Illinois is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Our programs and services are funded through the generosity of individuals, corporations, foundations and special events.



Lupus Society of Illinois

525 W. Monroe Street, Suite 900
Chicago, Illinois 60661
312-542-0002

800-2-LUPUS-2 • 800-258-7872
www.lupusil.org • info@lupusil.org

03CHG0490 • 1104

Positive Antinuclear Antibody Test • Robert S. Katz, M.D.



Lupus Society of Illinois

525 W. Monroe Street, Suite 900
Chicago, Illinois 60661

312-542-0002

800-2-LUPUS-2 • 800-258-7872

www.lupusil.org • info@lupusil.org