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# Lupus & Fertility: A Guide for Black Families

This guide aims to help patients understand how lupus and its treatments may impact fertility, pregnancy, and overall reproductive health.



## Lupus and Pregnancy

If you have lupus and want to start a family, it's important to plan ahead. Many women with lupus have healthy pregnancies, but there's a higher risk of complications like preterm birth or preeclampsia. Working closely with your healthcare team can help you prepare for a safe pregnancy.

### Key Steps for Managing Lupus During Pregnancy



#### Plan Ahead

Make sure your lupus is well-controlled for at least six months before trying to get pregnant.



#### Work with Specialists

Regular check-ups with your rheumatologist and a high-risk obstetrician can help prevent and manage complications.



#### Adjust Medications

Some lupus medications aren't safe during pregnancy. Your doctor may recommend safer alternatives.

## Pregnancy-Safe Medications for Lupus

If you have lupus and are planning a pregnancy, it's important to know which medications are safe for you and your baby. Some lupus drugs can cause birth defects or increase the risk of pregnancy complications, so your doctor may need to adjust your treatment before conception.



#### Medications That Are Generally Safe During Pregnancy

- **Hydroxychloroquine** – Helps control lupus symptoms and may reduce pregnancy complications.
- **Azathioprine** – Safe in lower doses and used for more severe lupus cases.
- **Low-Dose Aspirin** – Reduces the risk of preeclampsia and blood clots.
- **Corticosteroids** (Prednisone, Methylprednisolone) – Can be used for short-term lupus flare treatment but should be minimized due to side effects.



#### Medications That Should Be Avoided During Pregnancy

- **Methotrexate** – Can cause birth defects and miscarriages must be stopped a few months before conception.
- **Cyclophosphamide (Cytoxan)** – Linked to infertility and birth defects.
- **Mycophenolate mofetil (Cell Cept)** – Can cause serious birth defects and pregnancy loss.
- **Rituximab & Belimumab (Benlysta)** – Not enough research to confirm safety in pregnancy.








#### What You Can Do

- If you're on a medication that **isn't pregnancy safe**, talk to your doctor about switching to a safer alternative.
- Never stop a lupus medication without medical advice—uncontrolled lupus flares **can be more dangerous** than some medications.
- Work with a **high-risk pregnancy specialist** to monitor your treatment plan.

## Who's at Highest Risk for Pregnancy Complications?

While many people with lupus have healthy pregnancies, some are at higher risk for complications. knowing these risks can help you and your doctors take extra precautions.

### Higher Risk Groups:

- 
**People with Active Lupus**  
 If your lupus is not well-controlled, there's a higher risk of flares, preterm birth, and complications. It's recommended to wait at least six months after a flare before trying to conceive.
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**People with Kidney Involvement**  
 Pregnancy can put extra strain on the kidneys, increasing the risk of high blood pressure, preeclampsia, and premature delivery. Close monitoring by a nephrologist and high-risk OB is essential.
- 
**People with Antiphospholipid Syndrome (APS)**  
 This condition increases the risk of blood clots, miscarriage, and stillbirth. Blood thinners like aspirin and heparin can help reduce risks.
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**Black and Hispanic People**  
 Research shows that Black and Hispanic people with lupus may have more severe disease and higher pregnancy risks, partly due to healthcare disparities and genetic factors. Advocacy and early intervention are crucial.
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**People on High-Risk Medications**  
 If you're taking drugs like methotrexate, cyclophosphamide, or mycophenolate, these must be stopped well before pregnancy due to serious risks to the baby.

## What You Can Do

- ✓ Work with a high-risk OB/GYN who specializes in lupus pregnancies.
- ✓ Get a pre-pregnancy consultation with your rheumatologist to assess your health.
- ✓ Monitor your blood pressure, kidney function, and antibody levels regularly.
- ✓ Advocate for yourself – If you feel your concerns aren't being heard, seek a second opinion.

## Lupus and Male Fertility

While lupus is more common in women, men with lupus can also face fertility challenges. If you're thinking about having children, it's important to understand how lupus and its treatments can affect reproductive health.

### How Lupus Can Affect Male Fertility

- **Lupus Flares & Sperm Health** – During active lupus flares, inflammation and high disease activity may temporarily lower sperm count and quality.
- **Fatigue & Pain** – Chronic pain and fatigue can reduce libido and sexual function, making conception more difficult.
- **Hormonal Imbalances** – Lupus or certain medications can affect testosterone levels, potentially leading to reduced fertility.



## Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Talking openly with your doctor is important when managing lupus and planning for a family.

Here are some helpful questions:

“Is my lupus stable enough for pregnancy?”

1

“How do my medications affect fertility and pregnancy?”

2

“What pregnancy risks should I know about?”

3

“How can I prepare for a safe pregnancy while managing lupus?”

4

“Will I need extra monitoring or to see specialists during pregnancy?”

5

## Conclusion

Lupus and pregnancy require careful planning, but with the right medical team and monitoring, many people successfully have healthy babies. Knowing which medications are safe, understanding your antibody status, and being aware of potential risks can help you take control of your reproductive health. If you're considering pregnancy, start the conversation early with your doctors to create a plan that supports both your health and your baby's well-being.

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