

Corner Clinic

By UC San Diego Health Experts | March 06, 2018

Our experts answer your questions on everything from acne to zygomycosis. This month, our experts discuss how Mother Nature affects blood pressure, what it means if you have lupus and the causes of hiccups.

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Does cold weather affect blood pressure?

Anna McDivit Mizzell, MD, cardiologist, UC San Diego Health

Yes, cold weather does affect your blood pressure. Blood pressure tends to be higher in winter and lower in the summer. Colder temperatures make blood vessels constrict, which helps conserve heat and maintain body temperature, and in turn, increases blood pressure. Alternatively, warmer temperatures make blood vessels dilate, which lowers blood pressure.

Other causes of higher blood pressures in winter months are reduced physical activity and weight gain. Colder environmental temperatures are also associated with a higher incidence of hospital admission for acute heart attacks and stroke. It is wise to stay warm during the cold winter months.



What is lupus?

Brian Pedersen, MBBS, rheumatologist at UC San Diego Health

Systemic lupus erythematosus, better known as lupus, is a complex autoimmune disease that can affect many different tissues and organs. As with other autoimmune diseases, one's own immune system attacks healthy tissues and can cause organs to not function normally. The cause of lupus is not known, but it is thought to be caused by environmental factors in individuals with a genetic

predisposition. About 90 percent of people with lupus are women and the symptoms most often begin during childbearing years.

Lupus symptoms vary from person to person, but commonly include rashes, painful joints, mouth ulcers, extreme fatigue and a fever.

A diagnosis is made based on a collection of symptoms, a physical examination and lab work.

Treatments for this autoimmune disease vary depending on symptoms, but they often involve immune suppressants, which allow patients who have lupus to live a full life.



What causes hiccups?

Desiree Leithem, certified family nurse practitioner, UC San Diego Health

Hiccups are brief spasms of the diaphragm that can occur for a few seconds or minutes. Spasms cause an intake of breath that is suddenly stopped by the closure of the vocal cords. This closure causes the “hiccup” sound. Hiccups can be caused by eating too much food too quickly, swallowing too much air when drinking or chewing gum, drinking carbonated beverages or even from emotional stress or excitement.

Most bouts of hiccups go away on their own after a few minutes and do not require any treatment. You may have heard of or even tried your own method for getting rid of hiccups, like holding your breath, counting to 10 or drinking a glass of ice cold water. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that these methods work because they temporarily increase the amount of carbon dioxide in your blood, allowing your diaphragm to relax.

Hiccups that last longer than 48 hours are called persistent hiccups. Hiccups that last longer than a month are called intractable hiccups. Both persistent and intractable hiccups may be a sign of a more serious health problem and should be checked by your doctor.

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