

Grade: B

Class: Healthcare, Welfare & Wellness

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Understanding Autoimmune Diseases

In a healthy body, the **immune system** acts as a biological shield, protecting us from **pathogens** like bacteria and viruses. However, in an **autoimmune disease**, the immune system becomes overactive. It fails to distinguish between "self" and "non-self," causing it to mistakenly attack the body's own healthy **tissues** and **organs**.

Common Autoimmune Conditions

There are over 80 types of autoimmune disorders, which can be **organ-specific** or **systemic** (affecting the whole body):

- **Type 1 Diabetes:** The immune system attacks the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas.
- **Rheumatoid Arthritis:** A systemic condition where the immune system attacks the joints, causing **inflammation**, stiffness, and pain.
- **Multiple Sclerosis (MS):** The immune system damages the protective coating of the nerves, affecting communication between the brain and the body.
- **Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE):** Often called "Lupus," this affects many parts of the body, including the skin, joints, and kidneys. A common sign is a "butterfly-shaped" rash on the face.
- **Coeliac Disease:** An immune reaction to eating **gluten** (a protein found in wheat). This causes the immune system to attack the lining of the small intestine.
- **Psoriasis:** This condition causes the immune system to speed up the growth of skin cells, resulting in thick, red, and scaly patches on the skin.

Symptoms and "Flare-ups"

Most autoimmune diseases are **chronic**, meaning they last a long time. Patients often experience periods called **flare-ups**, where symptoms like **fatigue**, joint pain, or digestive issues become much worse. These are usually followed by periods of **remission**, where the symptoms disappear or stay quiet.

Treatment and Management

While there is currently no cure, doctors use **immunosuppressants** to reduce the immune response. **Physiotherapy**, stress management, and a balanced diet (like a gluten-free diet for Coeliac patients) are also essential. For healthcare assistants, the goal is to monitor the patient's **vital signs** and provide support during difficult flare-ups.



Exercise 1: Vocabulary Match (Expanded)

Medical Term	Definition
1. Systemic	A. A protein found in wheat that triggers an immune response.
2. Gluten	B. Relating to the whole body rather than a single part.
3. Fatigue	C. A period where the disease is inactive or symptoms are mild.
4. Remission	D. Extreme tiredness often found in chronic illnesses.
5. Organ-specific	E. A disease that affects only one part of the body (e.g., the pancreas).

Exercise 2: Identification Task

Which disease is the text describing?

1. The patient must follow a strict diet without wheat or barley: _____
2. The patient has a red rash on their cheeks in the shape of a butterfly: _____
3. The immune system attacks the coating of the nerves: _____
4. The patient has painful, inflamed joints: _____
5. The patient's skin cells grow too fast, causing red patches: ____

Exercise 3: The Patient Symptom Checklist

Read what the patients are saying. Match each patient's description to the correct **autoimmune disease** from the box below.

Psoriasis — Coeliac Disease — Rheumatoid Arthritis — Multiple Sclerosis (MS) — Lupus (SLE)

Patient Description	Condition
1. Patient A: "I feel a strange tingling in my legs, and sometimes I feel very dizzy and have trouble walking."	
2. Patient B: "My fingers and knees are very stiff and painful, especially when I wake up in the morning."	
3. Patient C: "I've noticed these thick, red, scaly patches on my elbows and knees. They are quite itchy."	
4. Patient D: "I get a lot of stomach pain and feel bloated every time I eat bread, cereal, or pasta."	
5. Patient E: "I've been feeling extremely tired lately, and I've developed this red rash across my nose and cheeks."	