

# Autoimmunity and Autoimmune Diseases: What You Should Know

The human immune system is designed to protect the body from outside invaders. It is constantly looking for harmful bacteria and viruses. Your immune system includes your spleen, lymph nodes, tonsils, bone marrow, and white blood cells.

Your immune system is an amazing machine. It knows the difference between good cells and the bad cells that can make you sick. It recognizes viruses, bacteria, and parasites. It fights these things with white blood cells.

When your body is attacked by foreign bodies, white blood cells called *B cells* go to work. B cells kill the invaders. Sometimes, specific B cells called *antibodies* fight specific invaders, or *antigens*. Once your body makes an antibody to fight an antigen, it will always remember.

## What Is Autoimmunity?

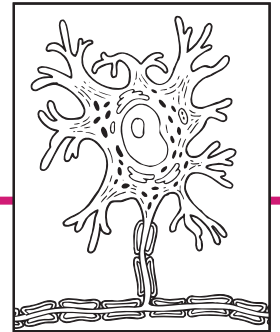
Autoimmunity is when your body's immune system fights the body itself. It is not uncommon. It can be serious. Most autoimmune diseases are treated with medicines. The medicines try to stop the body from attacking itself.

## What Is an Autoimmune Disease?

An autoimmune disease happens when the immune system attacks the body and doesn't stop. It can be very serious. Two factors are responsible. People who get autoimmune diseases usually have specific kinds of genes in their cells. And outside factors such as stress, bacteria, and viruses can set off the autoimmune reaction. Autoimmune diseases you may know include multiple sclerosis, type 1 diabetes, and a skin disease called *psoriasis*.

About 50 million Americans suffer from autoimmune diseases. More than 75% of these people are women. Some people are treated with medicines, some with special diets. Some blood diseases require blood transfusions.

The body is an amazing machine. But like all machines, it can sometimes malfunction. Now that you know about autoimmunity, you know a very unique way the body can work wrong.



## Questions:

- Which one of these does the human body's immune system **not** fight?  
 a. bacteria      b. viruses      c. sore muscles      d. parasites
- True or false: Autoimmune responses by the body are not serious. \_\_\_\_\_
- How do you know your answer to question 2 is correct? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Use text details to explain the two factors that cause an autoimmune disease. \_\_\_\_\_  
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- Use text details to explain why it is important to understand autoimmune diseases. \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Answers

1. c
2. False
3. Paragraph 4 states that autoimmunity can be serious.
4. Generally the two factors are genetic predisposition and an environmental trigger.
5. Answers will vary.

**Learn more about autoimmune disease at [www.aarda.org](http://www.aarda.org).**