

The American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA) wants to help you learn your family's Autoimmune Quotient, or AQ.

AQ is a play on IQ and is all about knowing how likely someone is to develop an autoimmune disease based on the prevalence of these diseases and their family history.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), there are 23.5 million Americans who suffer from autoimmune diseases and the prevalence of these diseases is rising. In comparison, cancer affects 15.5 million and heart disease up to 28 million. Autoimmune disease is among the top 10 leading causes of death in children and women under 65 and represents more than \$100 billion in annual direct health care costs. Yet a recent AARDA/Toluna Quicksurveys poll showed that only 59 percent of those surveyed understood what autoimmune disease is and just 20 percent were aware that there are more than 100 autoimmune diseases.



Knowledge is power.

By working through the steps in this brochure and doing your homework, you will have the knowledge to determine whether you or your loved ones could be at risk for developing an autoimmune disease.

Learn more at www.aarda.org.



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DO YOU KNOW YOUR FAMILY AQ?



HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR AQ

Get educated.

There are more than 100 autoimmune diseases and more diseases that are suspected to be autoimmune-related. The diseases themselves can affect almost any part of the body, including the kidneys, skin, heart, liver, lymph nodes, thyroid and the central nervous system. As a result, they cut across various medical specialties, such as endocrinology, neurology, dermatology, rheumatology, gastroenterology and hematology, among others. Autoimmune diseases include multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis, scleroderma, polymyositis, vasculitis, lupus, Sjögren's syndrome, autoimmune thrombocytopenic purpura (ATP), type 1 diabetes, Crohn's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, celiac and Graves' disease. Autoimmunity is the underlying cause of these diseases. It is the process whereby the immune system mistakenly recognizes the body's own proteins as foreign invaders and begins producing antibodies that attack healthy cells and tissues, causing a variety of diseases. Visit www.aarda.org for more detailed information and a complete disease list.

Be aware that autoimmune diseases target women.

Women are more likely than men to develop an autoimmune disease. Estimates indicate that 75 percent of those affected are women. These women are usually in their childbearing years. In recent years, autoimmunity has begun to be recognized as a major women's health issue. The Office of Research on Women's Health at NIH recognizes it as such and the Society for Advancement of Women's Health Research has named it one of 10 diseases that most disproportionately affect women.

Know that autoimmune diseases run in families.

Research points to a genetic component in autoimmune diseases. However, unlike typical genetic diseases where there is a specific gene mutation, in autoimmune diseases multiple genes are involved that collectively increase vulnerability or susceptibility. As a result, autoimmune diseases tend to cluster in families – not as one particular disease, but as a general tendency toward autoimmunity and, consequently, the development of different autoimmune diseases. For example, one family member may have autoimmune hepatitis while another has celiac disease and another, rheumatoid arthritis.

Document your family medical history.

Given the family connection, knowing the health histories of other family members is critical. For example, if your grandmother, father, sister or uncle has an autoimmune disease, you could be more susceptible to developing one yourself. Take an inventory of your family health problems, expanding your research beyond your immediate family to include grandparents, aunts, cousins and other relatives. Once you know your family history, share it with other family members and with your doctor. Your doctor can then assess potential problems with more accuracy and order appropriate tests.

Keep a symptoms list.

People with autoimmune diseases often suffer from several symptoms that, on the surface, seem unrelated. In addition, they may have suffered from other seemingly unrelated symptoms throughout their lives. It is important, therefore, to make a list of every major symptom you've experienced so that you can present it clearly to your doctor. List the symptoms in the order of concern to you.

Realize that getting an autoimmune disease diagnosis can be challenging.

The most recent AARDA study of autoimmune patients found that the average time for diagnosis of a serious autoimmune disease is three years. During that period, the patient typically has seen four doctors. The study also showed that 62 percent of the patients were told initially that they were too concerned about their health or that they were chronic complainers.

One of the factors that makes getting a correct autoimmune disease diagnosis so difficult is that symptoms can vary widely, notably from one disease to another, but even within the same disease. Also, because autoimmune diseases affect multiple systems, symptoms often can be misleading.

The medical community's lack of knowledge about autoimmune disease compounds the problem.

Even though these diseases share a genetic background and tend to run in families, most health questionnaires at doctors' offices do not ask whether there is a family history of autoimmune disease.

