



LEVELING LUPUS LESIONS

Each year, more than sixteen thousand people develop lupus -- a disorder of the immune system. Many of them will develop skin lesions on their face. Now, a new use for an old treatment that eliminates the embarrassment of this common condition.

TRANSCRIPT

Beverly Gibson says it's been tough living with lupus -- a disease that causes the body's immune system to attack its own cells.

Beverly Gibson
Has lupus
"It's changed my life a lot."

The condition caused lesions like these inside her mouth and on her face.

Beverly Gibson
"Right on my forehead and like right in here, and here on my face."

Even make-up wouldn't cover the spots completely.

Beverly Gibson
"I felt like everybody was looking at me, and you know, when they looked at me, all they looked at was my face."

Doctors say sun exposure can trigger the lesions.

Joseph Jorizzo, M.D.
Dermatologist
Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center
Winston-Salem, NC

"It doesn't have to be sun exposure like sitting on the beach. It can just be trips to the car that add up and produce this kind of problem."

When sunscreen and medications aren't enough, doctors are turning to the drug thalidomide.

Joseph Jorizzo, M.D.
"And it really has proven to be a lifesaver from the dermatologic standpoint in patients with very disfiguring skin disease that fail traditional therapy."

Once used as a sleep-aid, thalidomide was banned after causing severe birth defects in babies born to mothers who used it. It's had few negative side effects in this group and one very positive effect on Beverly.

Beverly Gibson
"I don't have those lesions or the sores anymore. It makes me feel more confident about myself."

Beverly says that makes the outside world a much friendlier place.

One side effect that may occur is tingling in the feet and hands after prolonged use. According to the Lupus Foundation of America, between 500,000 and 1.5 million people in the United States have lupus.

HEALTHY FOR LIFE EXTRA

BACKGROUND: Lupus is a chronic inflammatory disease that can affect various parts of the body, especially the skin, joints, blood, and kidneys. The body's immune system normally makes proteins called antibodies to protect the body against viruses, bacteria, and other foreign materials. In lupus, these antibodies mistake normal cells in the body's tissues for foreign bodies and attack them. For most people, lupus is a mild disease affecting only a few organs. For others, it may cause serious and even life-threatening problems. More than 16,000

Americans develop lupus each year. According to the Lupus Foundation of America, between 500,000 to 1.5 million Americans are living with lupus.

PAST LUPUS TREATMENT: Lupus often causes inflammation of the skin, in the form of a rash or lesion. It's usually triggered by sun exposure. "It doesn't have to be sun exposure like sitting on the beach. It can just be trips to the car that add up and produce this kind of problem," says Joseph Jorizzo, M.D., professor of dermatology at Wake Forest University School of Medicine. "There's a reaction that occurs where the body's immune system, with certain cells called lymphocytes attack the junction of the outer part of the skin called the epidermis and the middle part called the dermis," he says. The result is a rash on the skin. Usually it can be treated by use of sunscreens and topical medications, but in more stubborn cases, doctors at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem use thalidomide. Thalidomide was sold in the 1960's as an over-the-counter sleep-aid, but was banned after it caused severe deformities in the children of pregnant women who used it.

THALIDOMIDE TREATMENT: Patients receiving thalidomide therapy are placed on a low 100- milligram daily dosage, to be taken orally every evening. The treatment period needed to yield maximum health benefits is anywhere from 12 weeks to 16 weeks. Researchers did note that 91 percent of study patients showed a favorable response to thalidomide within 8 weeks. The price for the 28-day course is more than \$500, and it is reserved as a secondary line of therapy because of this significant cost to the patient. There are some risks associated with the drug, however. This includes fetal birth defects, numbness, tingling, burning, prickling, increased sensitivity, drowsiness, dizziness, weight gain, abnormal menstruation cycles, constipation, headaches, and nausea.

SUCCESS IN PATIENTS: Doctors at Wake Forest University School of Medicine gave thalidomide to nearly 25 patients with lupus-related skin lesions. In 74 percent of the patients, the lesions disappeared completely. Thirteen percent of patients had 75 percent improvement and three had less than 75 percent improvement. Dr. Jorizzo says, "It really has proven to be a lifesaver from the dermatologic standpoint in patients with very disfiguring skin disease that fail traditional therapy," says Jorizzo.