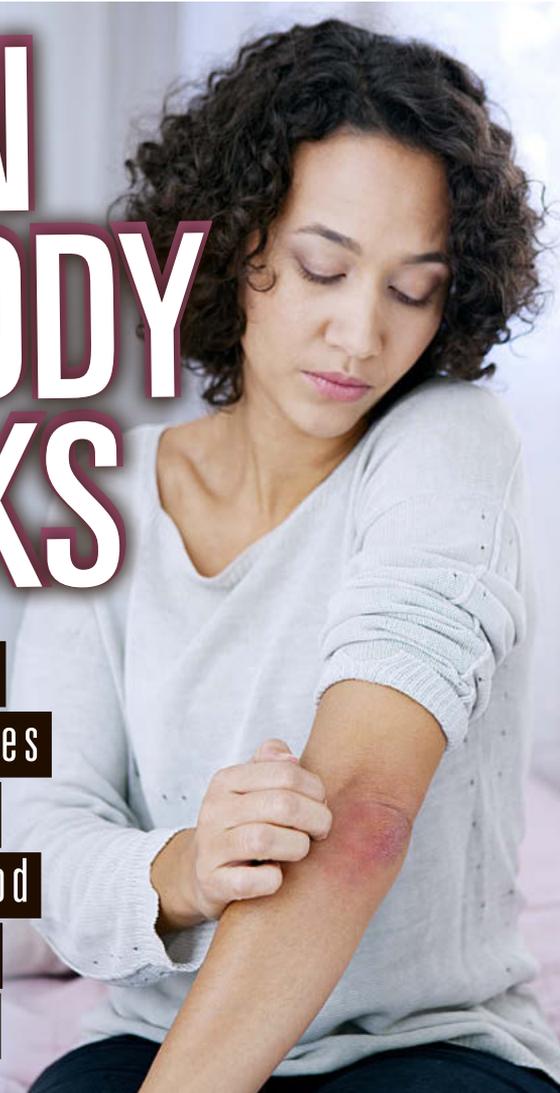


Laura Hamilton suffers from a rare autoimmune disease



WHEN YOUR BODY ATTACKS



Achey? Anxious?
Autoimmune diseases
are common, yet
often misunderstood
or misdiagnosed
as "normal life"

TV's Laura Hamilton recently spoke of her dash to A&E following her second Covid jab. The complications were triggered by a rare autoimmune disease she suffers from, ITP (immune thrombocytopenic purpura), which causes the body to attack its own platelets.

An autoimmune disease is a condition where the immune system wrongly identifies part of the body as "foreign" and fights it in an



Farzanah Nasser

attempt to keep you safe, but with the opposite result.

There are more than 80 autoimmune diseases, each with a different name indicating which part of the body is being attacked. For example, it's called arthritis if it affects your joints and psoriasis if it's your skin.

Farzanah Nasser, a nutritionist at London Clinic of Nutrition who specialises in autoimmune diseases, says anyone can develop one, although 80%

of those affected are women. "Autoimmunity will affect everyone in a different way and for different reasons," she says. "Nobody is the same and the causes and symptoms for each person will be completely different. That's why it's so important to take a personalised approach to autoimmunity."

The symptoms and triggers depend on the disease and what the immune system is targeting. Farzanah, who has ten years' experience in the industry, adds, "Up to 80% of the immune system resides in the gut, so many sufferers may have symptoms like

food sensitivities, gas, bloating, change in bowel habit, acid reflux or general gut discomfort. Some triggers include environmental toxins, hormone imbalances, infections, stress, genetics and food sensitivities."

Although most conditions are fairly easy to diagnose via blood testing, sometimes imaging hospital scans are needed to assess the damage to the body.

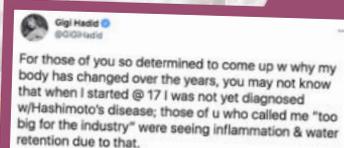
"The degree of damage will depend on where the autoimmunity is. If left untreated, it can destroy the part of the body under attack," Farzanah explains.

HASHIMOTOS

Gigi Hadid has spoken openly about her battle with the disease, which affects the thyroid. "Those of you who called me 'too big for the industry' were seeing inflammation and water retention due to Hashimotos," she said.

Drugs can replace the lost thyroid hormones, but need to be taken for life.

Key symptoms: Fatigue, brain fog, weight gain and a puffy face, sensitivity to cold, joint ache, hair loss, infertility.



RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Affecting the joints or tendons, this is the UK's most common cause of pain and physical disability. *Emmerdale* actress Claire King has shared her experience of the condition.

"I don't want to be a helpless old woman who can't do anything for anyone because all my joints are falling apart," she said.

Sadly, there's no cure, but symptoms are treated with medications known as disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs).

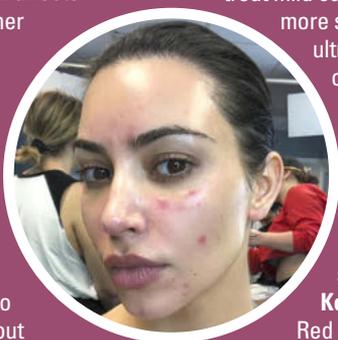
Key symptoms: Tender, warm, swollen and stiff joints, fatigue, fever, loss of appetite.



PSORIASIS

Kim Kardashian has battled this condition, which affects the skin, since her early twenties, when it was triggered by a common cold.

"I get it constantly and the spots are unpredictable. I have learned to live with it without using any creams or medication – I just deal. Sometimes I cover it up and sometimes it doesn't really bother me," she shared.



Steroid creams or ointments treat mild cases while for more severe cases, ultraviolet (UV) or natural light kills the overactive white blood cells that are attacking healthy skin cells.

Key symptoms: Red patches of skin covered with thick, silvery scales, dry or cracked skin that may itch and bleed, itching or burning, pitted or ridged nails.

COELIAC DISEASE

Your body attacks its own tissue when you eat gluten, which damages the gut. Megan Mckenna, who's been in and out of hospital with the condition, explains, "It's a life changer. You can't eat what you want, drink what you want and there are even beauty struggles. Coeliac disease is a big thing, it can be life-threatening."

There's no cure. Instead sufferers control it by removing gluten from their diet – swapping bread, cakes, biscuits and beer for gluten-free varieties – and they need watch out for cross-contamination.

Key symptoms: Diarrhoea or constipation, stomach aches, bloating and flatulence, fatigue, unintentional weight loss, infertility.



She adds, "Rebalancing hormones, finding the root cause of inflammation and resolving it, reducing stress and removing hidden infections can all help bring a body back into balance, as well as reduce symptoms and set the autoimmunity back into remission."

"There are numerous studies showing the benefits of trying to

uncover the triggers. There are also many that show how supporting the gut and immune system can have a huge impact. Interestingly there's a higher prevalence of autoimmunity the further away from the sun you live."

According to Farzanah, these are the six conditions most likely to affect women...

TYPE 1 DIABETES

The immune system attacks the pancreas and destroys the cells that produce insulin, which can affect the major organs. Singer Nick Jonas says, "You can't always see what goes into managing an invisible illness, and Type 1 diabetes can feel lonely and isolating."

Treatment includes taking insulin.

Key symptoms: Thirst, passing urine more often than usual, fatigue, weight loss and loss of muscle bulk, persistent infections, such as thrush.



'I feel sad that I waited so long to get checked out'

Megan Davies, 27, from Wales was diagnosed with Hashimotos in 2020.

It took seven years of constant fatigue, weight gain and joint aches to finally be diagnosed. It felt like my symptoms were just "life" but I feel sad I waited so long to get checked out.

I continue to live with various symptoms, including hair loss, brain fog and the inability to retain heat – my hands and feet are always like ice cubes. However, since being on hormone replacement tablets, my mood has brightened and I don't suffer every day. I still get flare-ups, and I'm still trying to determine triggers



for those, starting with food sensitivities. So far, I've cut out meat, gluten and dairy and walk lots to try to relieve stress.

The most disheartening symptom of the condition is the weight gain, no matter how well I eat or push myself at the gym.



'If I ingest any gluten I look pregnant'

Kirsty Hatcher, 29, from Cardiff, was diagnosed with coeliac disease last year.

For four years I suffered various episodes of nausea, stomach cramps, bloating, sweating and even fainting on the tube, until a blood test, endoscopy and biopsy confirmed my diagnosis. I

cried when my doctor told me!

I dropped nearly a stone during the first seven months of my diagnosis, but one of the benefits of the pandemic has been the chance to work out what I can and can't eat. I have to be extremely careful, including not sharing spreads or the same toaster as my housemates,

making restaurants aware about cross-contamination and carrying emergency snacks wherever I go.

If I do ever accidentally ingest some gluten, it's not a pretty sight. As well as looking five-months pregnant, it's like the worst period cramps you've ever had and diarrhoea to add to the fun, too. As daunting as my diagnosis was initially, I'm glad to say things have improved with time.



For more information or advice visit londonclinicofnutrition.co.uk and [instagram.com/londonclinicofnutrition](https://www.instagram.com/londonclinicofnutrition)