

People with autoimmune diseases: Keep taking your meds during the pandemic

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People with autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus often take medicines that suppress their immune system as part of their regular treatment.

In a new editorial in *Australian Prescriber*, Associate Professor Phillip

Robinson and Dr. Evan Bursle from the University of Queensland advise people with autoimmune diseases to keep taking their medicines as prescribed, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"A healthy immune system helps protect the body from infections including viruses like coronavirus," says Associate Professor Robinson.

"However, for people with autoimmune diseases, the body's own [immune system](#) attacks itself which is why immunosuppressants are used in treatment. From what we know from currently available studies, people taking immunosuppressants are no more likely than the [general population](#) to be hospitalized for COVID-19, to need oxygen in hospital, or to die from the infection. It remains important, however, to keep [autoimmune diseases](#) under control. This is why international rheumatology guidelines recommend that people with autoimmune disease only stop treatment if they get COVID-19. For people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, suspending the immunosuppressant medicines may be appropriate depending on the circumstances of the individual person. If you do find yourself in this situation, your doctor will advise you of the best course of action for you," said Associate Professor Robinson.

More information: Philip C Robinson et al. Management of autoimmune disease during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Australian Prescriber* (2020). [DOI: 10.18773/austprescr.2020.058](https://doi.org/10.18773/austprescr.2020.058)

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