

When an employee informs you they have lupus, as an employer you might be confronted with questions about how to accommodate the employee's disability.

Some people with lupus may need accommodations while some may not, as the effects of lupus vary from person to person.

It's important to be aware of the limitations one living with lupus experiences and to consider how that will affect their job performance and productivity.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) website can assist you to better understand your responsibilities as an employer ([www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)) and what is required by an employer to provide reasonable accommodations for a disability due to lupus at the employee's request. A disability can be defined as "an impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities".

Here are a few basic considerations to keep in mind when an accommodation request is made:

- The ADA specifically prohibits an employer from firing or from failing to hire a person with a chronic illness, such as lupus, on the basis of the disability "if they are able to do the job with reasonable accommodation". A reasonable accommodation is any adjustment to a job or work situation that makes it possible for the employee to effectively accomplish the duties of the job.
- Ensure that the accommodation is effective. Whatever is provided must give the employee the opportunity to perform at a level that they can achieve the same result as a non-disabled person. Employers are not required to provide items for personal use such as wheelchairs or canes.
- Listen to your employee – some limitations cannot be seen such as sensitivity to fluorescent lights and sunlight; sensitivity to cold temperatures and drafts; joint pain, inflammation, stiffness and fatigue.
- Be sensitive -- sharing the news about a disability that could affect job performance is a personal and often difficult decision. Lupus flares (a period of worsening symptoms) can be triggered by stress. Disclosing information as personal as a chronic illness on the job can be stress provoking. Often times the employee is compelled to hide their information for fear of a change in job responsibilities or termination.

Accommodating an employee does not require a large dollar investment. According to a 1990 study by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), one-third of all reasonable accommodations required no additional cost to the employer, with more than half costing \$1000 or less. JAN 's ([www.jan.wvu.edu](http://www.jan.wvu.edu)) website provides suggestions for

accommodations for employees with lupus, estimating that 80% of those listed cost less than \$500. In the long run, a company making job accommodations will benefit financially due to increased productivity and morale.

As no two people manifest lupus the same way, no two people will necessarily require the same accommodation. The JAN website provides a comprehensive list of accommodations according to need. Below are just a few suggested accommodations:

- Allow flexible work hours and leave time
- Prioritize job assignments and provide memory aids such as organizers
- Reduce job stress
- Allow telecommuting and work from home schedules
- Limit outdoor activities to during the hours of 10am and 4pm
- Provide protective sleeves for fluorescent light bulbs
- Provide portable heaters in cold and drafty workspaces
- Allow personal telephone calls to doctors during work hours and other support
- Provide information sessions on lupus for all employees which include sensitivity training
- Develop systems that address work problems before they arise

The following resources are available on line:

SLE Lupus Foundation  
330 Seventh Avenue  
Suite 1701  
New York, NY 10001  
(800) 74-LUPUS  
(212) 685-4418  
[lupus@lupusny.org](mailto:lupus@lupusny.org)  
[www.lupusny.org](http://www.lupusny.org)

The S.L.E. Lupus Foundation is one of the nation's leading lupus organizations. It provides patient services, education, public awareness, and funding for lupus research.

Job Accommodation Network  
West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080

(800) 526-7234  
(877) 781-9403 – TTY  
[jan@jan.wvu.edu](mailto:jan@jan.wvu.edu)  
[www.jan.wvu.edu](http://www.jan.wvu.edu)

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

Office of Disability Employment Policy  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 0210  
(202) 693-7880  
(202) 693-7781 – TTY  
[infoODEP@dol.gov](mailto:infoODEP@dol.gov)  
[www.dol.gov/odep](http://www.dol.gov/odep)

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the US Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

Arthritis Foundation  
PO Box 7669  
Atlanta, GA 30357-0669  
(800) 283-7800  
[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

The mission of the Arthritis Foundation is to support research to find the cure for and prevention of arthritis and to improve the quality of life for those living with arthritis.