
PSORIASIS

Psoriasis is a persistent, inflammatory skin condition. Some cases of psoriasis are so mild that people don't know they have it. Alternatively, severe psoriasis may cover large areas of the body. Dermatologists can help even the most severe cases. Psoriasis is not contagious, so it cannot be passed from one person to another. Psoriasis does, however, have a tendency to run in families, meaning it can be an inherited condition.

While the cause is unknown, research indicates that the immune system plays a key role.

It is believed that the person's immune system mistakenly activates T cells, a type of white blood cell. Once activated, the T cells trigger inflammation, which causes the skin to grow too rapidly. Normally, the skin replaces itself about every 30 days. When the process speeds up and the skin replaces itself in three to four days, psoriasis develops.

A "trigger" is usually needed to make psoriasis appear, whether for the first time or the twentieth. Psoriasis can be triggered by stress; an infection, such as strep throat; and by taking certain medicines, such as interferon and lithium. Cold, dry winter weather and lack of sunlight also can trigger psoriasis. Others see psoriasis flare 10 to 14 days after their skin is injured, such as by a cut, scratch, or severe sunburn.

There are five major types of psoriasis, each with unique signs and symptoms:

- **PLAQUE PSORIASIS** – The most common type, plaque psoriasis appears as patches of raised, reddish skin covered by silver-white scale. Patches frequently form on the elbows, knees, lower back, and scalp, but can occur anywhere on the skin.
- **GUTTATE PSORIASIS** – appearing as small, red spots, guttate psoriasis usually affects children and young adults. It often starts after a sore throat, frequently clears up by itself in weeks or a few months.
- **PUSTULAR PSORIASIS** - Characterized by white pustules surrounded by red skin, pustular psoriasis tends to confine itself to certain areas of the body, usually the palms and soles. Dermatologists call this "localized pustular psoriasis." When widespread, the condition is known as "generalized pustular psoriasis," which is a rare and severe form of psoriasis that can be life threatening.
- **INVERSE PSORIASIS** – this type occurs when smooth, red lesions form in the skin folds. Lesions can appear in the armpit, under the breasts, and around the groin, buttocks, and genitals.
- **ERYTHRODERMIC PSORIASIS** – causing widespread redness with severe itching and pain, erythrodermic psoriasis can be life threatening.
- **PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS** – between 10% and 30% of people who develop psoriasis get a related form of arthritis called "psoriatic arthritis," which causes inflammation of the joints. Psoriatic arthritis is a lifelong condition that causes deterioration, pain, and stiffness in the joints. Medication can help prevent joint deformities and disability if used early. Without treatment, permanent joint degeneration and destruction can occur.

Psoriasis frequently develops on the scalp and the nails. When it occurs on the scalp, psoriasis often causes silvery-white scale, which may be misdiagnosed as dandruff. Psoriatic nails frequently have tiny pits. The nails may loosen, thicken, or crumble. These signs may be misdiagnosed as a nail infection. Both scalp psoriasis and nail psoriasis can be difficult to treat.

While psoriasis cannot be cured, a number of treatment options can help control psoriasis. A patient's health, age, lifestyle, and the severity of the psoriasis determine which treatment options are appropriate. Gaining control over the psoriasis may require different types of treatment and several visits to your dermatologist.

Information obtained from American Academy of Dermatology.

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For a specified diagnosis or treatment please call our office, 724-837-5810.*