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# Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a chronic skin condition that affects between 1-3% of the population. Psoriasis varies in severity from mild to severe. Psoriasis can affect the nails, skin and joints (psoriatic arthritis). The scalp, elbows, and knees are the most common sites for psoriasis, however any part of the skin may be affected. The cause of psoriasis is unknown. Psoriasis is not contagious. A skin biopsy may be done to confirm the diagnosis. The longer a patient has psoriasis, the greater the risk for developing heart disease & diabetes. This risk should be discussed with your primary care provider.

**UNFORTUNATELY THERE ARE STILL NO KNOWN CURES FOR PSORIASIS!** Most patients require daily treatment for many years if not lifelong. Sometimes certain treatments don't work or stop working. There are many different treatments for psoriasis because no single treatment works best for all patients.

## Things you can do to help psoriasis:

- 1) Don't scratch or pick at the psoriasis spots because that can make them enlarge.
- 2) If you have psoriasis on your scalp wash your hair with nonprescription dandruff/psoriasis type shampoos (shampoos that contain zinc pyrithione, selenium sulfide, tar, salicylic acid) to remove the scale. It is best to let the shampoo remain on your scalp for 5 – 10 minutes before rinsing it out.
- 3) Moderate sunlight exposure is often helpful. Do not get sunburned, since psoriasis may settle in areas of injured skin. Sunlight causes aging of the skin and skin cancer, so don't overdo it.
- 4) Certain medications can worsen psoriasis. Lithium, antimalarials, certain beta-blockers (used for high blood pressure and heart disease), and some arthritis medications can make psoriasis worse. If you have noticed that your psoriasis has worsened within several months of starting one of these medications, let the prescribing physician know to see if you can be switched off it to another medicine. People with psoriasis should avoid taking steroid pills or steroid shots as although these can initially improve the psoriasis, when they wear off the psoriasis can flare and be worse than it was to start with.

**There are many prescription drugs that can be used to help improve psoriasis.** These include:

- 1) Corticosteroid containing products that you apply directly to the psoriasis on your skin. These products come in various strengths. They are available as liquids, creams, ointments, tapes and shampoos. It is important to realize that high strength corticosteroid products can lead to permanent thinning of the skin if used repeatedly day after day for long periods of time. Certain areas of the skin are more predisposed to this thinning including the face, underarms and groin area.
- 2) Tar containing products can be applied directly to the skin. Some of the more effective tar containing products unfortunately have an unpleasant odor and can stain fabric and light colored hair.
- 3) There are a number of other topical medications that can be used. Many of these are too expensive for people who don't have insurance coverage to help pay for their medications. These products include anthralin, Dovonex (vitamin D), and Tazorac. These medications are usually used along with a corticosteroid cream.
- 4) There are a number of pills that can be used to help control psoriasis but side effects are more common with these medications so that blood test monitoring is often required. These pills include methotrexate, acetretin, and cyclosporine.
- 5) Biologic agents are used both for psoriasis skin and joint disease. These include tumor necrosis-alpha inhibitors (Enbrel, Humira, Remicade), interleukin inhibitors (Stelara, Cosentyx) and Otezla. The down side is that these agents are very expensive and have potentially serious side effects. Therefore these agents are usually reserved for more serious cases.
- 6) Anti-itch pills can be very helpful to control the itching that sometimes develops in psoriasis. It is important to avoid scratching these areas as it can make things worse.
- 7) There are two types of light treatments (photo therapy) that can help improve psoriasis but these require frequent visits to the doctor's office and have been associated with an increased risk of skin cancer.

For more information on psoriasis contact the National Psoriasis Foundation, phone: (503) 244-7404 or on the internet at [www.psoriasis.org](http://www.psoriasis.org). You can obtain additional information at: [www.skincarephysicians.com](http://www.skincarephysicians.com).

