

PSORIASIS

Psoriasis is a common skin disorder affecting about 1 in 40 persons. In the United States more than 4 million people have psoriasis. The cause of psoriasis is not known. Many persons with psoriasis have blood relatives with this disorder, so heredity plays a role.

In psoriasis, areas of the skin grow much faster than normal and form red, scaling patches. The scalp, elbows, and knees are the most common sites, but any part of the skin may become involved. Psoriasis usually does not affect your general health. Psoriasis may be associated with arthritis and patients with severe psoriasis may have an increased risk of heart problems. Psoriasis often causes problems because it itches and is unsightly. Psoriasis is *not* contagious.

Psoriasis usually begins in young adulthood, although it can start at any age. In most cases psoriasis is mild and is limited to a few areas of the body. In a small percentage of cases, large areas of the body may become involved. Psoriasis is unpredictable. Patches may clear up by themselves and even disappear for months or years.

While psoriasis is an unsightly nuisance, it should not prevent you from leading a full, active life.

You will be given individualized instructions for treatment of your psoriasis. Treatment is temporarily effective, and may need to be continued for quite a while. You will find it reassuring to know that (1) diet does *not* affect psoriasis, (2) psoriasis will *not* cause your hair to fall out, and (3) psoriasis is *not* caused by nerves. Stress may worsen psoriasis just as stress may worsen any illness.

If you have psoriasis of the scalp, it helps to wash your hair often. A medicated shampoo is also helpful.

Treatments for psoriasis are divided into two main forms:

- 1) Topical creams for small patches of psoriasis and
- 2) Whole body treatment for more widespread psoriasis.

There are many types of topical treatments for psoriasis including emollients (Vaseline, dry skin cream), tar preparations, cortisone creams, and vitamin D based ointments. Which you use depends on the type and severity of your psoriasis.

Among the whole body treatments are:

- 1) Moderate sunlight exposure is often helpful. Many patients improve in the summer because of the sunlight. Winter vacations to sunny climates are also helpful.
- 2) Ultraviolet light phototherapy helps psoriasis. This is done in the office 2-3 times per week by standing in a sunlight (UVB) box. It is very safe and effective.
- 3) Drugs such as methotrexate, cyclosporin, or acitretin (Soriatane) given by mouth or injection, are used for severe psoriasis. Each of these medications has potential risks and will be discussed individually if necessary.
- 4) PUVA treatment combines a psoralen (an internal medicine) with ultraviolet A light. (PUVA=Psoralen + UltraViolet A). This is done in the office 2 times per week by standing in a sunlight (UVA) box. At times PUVA is combined with oral acitretin (Soriatane) pills which can cut down on any possible side effects.