



Top Ten Tips for Calling Your Members of Congress and Their Staff

Capitol Hill Day
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Calling the offices of members of Congress is one of the easiest and most effective ways for individuals with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis and their loved ones to communicate with policymakers on important issues. Such a phone call, if done correctly, can result in support for the Foundation's public policy priorities.

When calling policymakers, be sure to do so on your own time and with your own phone, as your employer might not share your views. It is best to contact the Washington, D.C., offices as they are better equipped to handle a greater volume of constituent calls. Also, most policy staff are located in the Capitol Hill office, not in the district.

To reach the offices of your two senators and your representative in the House, just call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202.224.3121 and ask to be transferred to the appropriate offices. If you are not sure who represents you, just visit www.senate.gov and www.house.gov or www.psoriasis.org to learn your policymakers' names.

Be sure to keep a record of the date and time of your call(s), and the person with whom you spoke or for whom you left a message. Sometimes the phone logs are lost, and you may need to follow up with the office to ensure a response.

Top ten tips:

1. **Identify yourself as a constituent.** Clearly state your first and last name, your hometown and why you are calling. If you know the health legislative assistant (HLA), be sure to ask for that staffer by name. If not, ask for the staffer's name and request to be transferred. Sometimes, the receptionist will indicate that you will need to leave your comments with him/her. If that is the case, you still should ask for the name of the HLA so that you have it for future reference.

"My name is Jessie Johnson. I live in San Francisco, and I have psoriasis. I would like to speak with the health legislative assistant about a psoriasis research issue, please."

2. **Immediately identify the topic you are calling to discuss.**

"According to the National Institutes of Health, as many as 7.5 million Americans have psoriasis. I am concerned that there is no cure for this disease and that too many people with psoriasis do not have access to the effective treatments they need and deserve. I urge the senator (or representative) to support the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Research, Care and Cure Act."

3. **Make a few brief points as to why the issue is of concern to you, your community and the nation and why the member should take action.** You may want to use written notes to help you stay on topic and remain clear while articulating your case.

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“After decades when no new treatments were identified, we finally have new, cutting-edge treatments that are making a difference for people with psoriasis. Too many people like me have health insurance that does not cover treatment and/or there are policies in place that serve as barriers to direct access. Effective treatments help keep people healthy and productive—at work and fully functioning at home—making a difference in their and their families’ lives.”

4. **Be clear as to what you are asking the member to do** (e.g., cosponsor a particular bill, vote for or against a specific measure, sign a “Dear Colleague” letter).

“I urge the senator to show his/her support for me and other people with psoriasis living in our state by cosponsoring the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Research, Care and Cure Act.”

5. **Be polite in your tone and language.** The staffer on the other end of the phone is overworked, overwhelmed, underpaid and receives dozens—if not hundreds—of calls a day. In some offices, you may be speaking with a junior staffer or a college intern, so be patient and forgiving. Also, be sure not to use any “lingo” or “slang” (e.g., do not use acronyms in your speech like “NIAMS” when you mean National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases). You should not assume the person on the other end of the phone is familiar with the issue you are discussing so be as clear and concise as possible.

6. **Keep it brief.** Limit your call to no more than five minutes unless the staffer asks you questions and seems engaged in the discussion. Offer to send additional or follow-up information to the staffer and request their preferred mode of communication (e.g., e-mail or fax).

7. **Specifically request a written response** from the office on the member’s position or action on the issue you addressed.

“I would like a letter from your office spelling out the senator’s views on this issue and what he/she is doing specifically to address psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.”

8. **Provide your full name, mailing address, e-mail address and phone number.**

“My name is Jessie Johnson, 123 Main Street, San Francisco, CA 94123. My phone number is 415.555.1234. I look forward to hearing back from your office.”

9. **Thank the staffer** for his/her time and indicate that you appreciate his/her willingness to listen and record your comments. Be sure to get the name of the staffer so you can have it for your records, and be sure to record the day and time you spoke in case you need to follow up.

“May I have your first and last name for my records? Thank you very much for your time and for recording my views and seeing that I receive a response from the senator. Goodbye.”

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10. If you do not receive a response within a reasonable time frame (approximately a month), either call or write to follow up and request a response. Reference your phone call and mention with whom you spoke and the topic to help facilitate a meaningful reply.

Other tips

If you reach the voicemail box of a staffer, leave a brief, clear message, providing your full name, contact information and the nature of your call and specific request (e.g., cosponsor the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Research, Care and Cure Act); be clear that you would like a return call and/or a letter from the member of Congress on the topic about which you are calling. Also, be sure to note the staffer's name for future reference.

Keep in touch with the offices of your members of Congress so as to establish a relationship and make yourself available as a local resource on psoriasis issues. There are times when you and an elected official will have to "agree to disagree," but, over time, you also may find that the policymaker will be supportive and helpful on other matters.

You can reach your members of Congress in the following ways:

- ✓ Phone through the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202.224.3121
- ✓ E-mail your U.S. representative through: www.house.gov/writerep
- ✓ E-mail both of your two U.S. senators by looking up their contact information through: www.senate.gov

Visit www.psoriasis.org for alerts on priority issues, model correspondence to send to federal policymakers, and quick links and information about your congressional delegation. You can also find contact information for your senators and representative by visiting www.psoriasis.org/advocacy and entering your ZIP code.