



FACTS ABOUT PSORIASIS

What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a noncontagious, lifelong skin disease that affects 125 million people worldwide. It generally appears as patches of raised, red skin covered by flaky, white buildup of dead skin cells. These patches, or lesions, most commonly appear on the scalp, knees, elbows and torso, are often itchy and can be painful.

Who gets it?

Psoriasis affects both genders equally. It can strike at any age, although it commonly appears between the ages of 15 and 25. It is not possible to predict who will get psoriasis, although scientists believe heredity and environmental factors play a role. As many as 7.5 million Americans have psoriasis, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Disease severity

Psoriasis can be mild, moderate or severe. One way to measure this severity is by how much of the body's surface area is covered by psoriasis. Most cases of psoriasis are considered mild, affecting a small percentage of the body. However, psoriasis can also have a serious impact even if it involves a small area, such as the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet.

Psoriasis severity is also measured by how the disease affects a person's quality of life. Many people with psoriasis have reported trouble sleeping, difficulty using their hands, and walking, sitting and standing for long periods of time.

About 10 percent to 30 percent of people with psoriasis will develop psoriatic arthritis, an inflammatory disease of the joints and soft tissue around them. People with psoriasis who are experiencing joint pain and/or stiffness should be examined by a rheumatologist to see if they have psoriatic arthritis. Early detection can prevent joint damage and pain.

What causes psoriasis?

Although the exact cause of psoriasis is unknown, most researchers believe it is related to the body's immune system. Psoriasis is also believed to be genetic; however, not everyone can trace their psoriasis to a family history of the disease.

In people with psoriasis, the immune system is mistakenly "triggered," ultimately causing skin cells to pile up on the surface. Triggers may include emotional stress, injury to the skin, smoking, some types of infection and reaction to certain drugs.

Treatments

There is no cure for psoriasis, but many treatments are available to help manage its symptoms.

Psoriasis is treated in a variety of ways, and some people use a combination of treatments. These include topical treatments, phototherapy (exposure to ultraviolet light), and oral and injected medications.

Some people with psoriasis find relief with alternative treatments such as acupuncture, dietary supplements, climatotherapy and meditation.

No single treatment works for everyone. The goal is to work with a doctor to find a treatment that works the best with the fewest side effects, based on the individual's type of psoriasis and medical history.

Research

New treatments for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis are in the research and development stages. The National Psoriasis Foundation supports research toward these treatments and advocates for access to treatment on behalf of people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.