Jacob L.
Age 12  |  Tampa, Fla.

Jacob L. is a typical 12-year-old—except for the three times a week he visits a special clinic to receive ultraviolet light treatments and the creams and ointments he must apply to his skin to keep red, itchy psoriasis patches at bay.

“It’s really, really, really annoying because it’s itchy or it hurts,” Jacob says. “But there’s medications, and that can make it a little better.”

Jacob’s journey with psoriasis began three years ago, when a rash first appeared on his scalp. Jacob’s mother Susan took him to a dermatologist, who diagnosed him with ringworm and prescribed a powerful medication.

“I said, ‘Shouldn’t you do a culture?’” Susan recalls. “I had looked online and when I typed in ‘strep throat bumps on scalp,’ psoriasis came up. But no one was listening.”

A saga of multiple doctors and misdiagnoses followed. Jacob took everything from the ringworm medication to antibiotics. Still, his condition worsened. Finally, yet another dermatologist recognized the rash as psoriasis. **Seven months had passed since the family’s first doctor visit.**

Though having a diagnosis made things a little easier to understand, Susan was still dismayed at the treatment options available to her son.

“One [of the medications] actually said not to use it for people under 18, because it could shut down your adrenals,” Susan said. “They told me to use these steroids, then said to put them on with a Q-tip because it causes thinning of your skin. So he’s using steroids, using shampoos, and then at night he has to sit in the tub and be covered head to toe with creams.”

Finally, doctors at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore recommended phototherapy, a treatment for skin psoriasis in which the affected areas are briefly exposed to ultraviolet light. The family was lucky to find a clinic near their Tampa, Fla., home that would provide light treatments for children. A few months later, his skin was almost clear.

Recently, psoriasis has returned to Jacob’s scalp and ears. Susan says he will soon enter another round of light treatment. A $30 copay for the thrice-weekly sessions will add up, but Susan says she’s grateful that there is a treatment—though, like any mom, she can’t help but worry about the future.

“I worry about how bad his psoriasis will be and what effect it will have on his life, especially as he turns into a teenager and someone makes fun of him. I worry about all the things I have read about psoriasis and other health problems with the heart. I worry about the steroids and UVB treatments. I am 37 and have already had skin cancers, and here I am putting my son in a lightbox.”