STEVEN SCHULZ
39 years old  |  New York, N.Y.

Steven Schulz feels lucky to have found a treatment that keeps his psoriasis at bay. Sadly, he may soon find himself without that same medication.

Now 39, Steven has had psoriasis for as long as he can remember. For most of his childhood in northern New Jersey, the disease appeared as small patches of dry skin on his ears and scalp.

After college, the stresses of adulthood and a difficult relationship were made worse by severe psoriasis flares. The worst time came in his late 20s, when Steven was working for an insurance company by day, with a night job at a Starbucks coffee shop. Stress was taking a heavy toll. Psoriasis lesions crept onto his face and neck, and eventually covered 75 percent of his body.

“I had to start wearing cover-up and women’s makeup,” he remembers. People would go to the person at the register and ask if I was safe to make coffee. I would button the top button on my shirt, slap on makeup and hope it would be OK.”

To make matters worse, the insurance company job was eliminated after a merger. Fortunately, Starbucks offered health insurance. Steven began taking Remicade, one of a class of drugs that inhibit the out-of-control immune system response that leads to psoriasis. The treatment was effective, and he was ecstatic.

“I had struggled my whole life and whenever there was stress it increased,” he said. “[Remicade] was like a miracle, because, underneath, psoriasis is a tremendous amount of torment.”

Health insurance covered most of the cost of the drug, except for a small copayment. Then, in 2007, Schulz lost his Starbucks job. Through COBRA, he was able to keep his insurance and continue to take Remicade.

But today, he remains unemployed. With his COBRA benefit expiring, Schulz now faces the prospect of losing the one medication that has truly stabilized his psoriasis.

“The retail for three vials [of Remicade] every two months is about $2,200. The office visit is $425. I don’t like to rely on other people, so I am crossing my fingers to get a job and get hooked up again.”

Steven’s right elbow