Jimmy McKinney had never heard of psoriasis when his doctor delivered the news that he had the disease. He’d first noticed the red spots on his legs following a trip to Puerto Rico, and thought that maybe he’d been bitten by an insect.

He made an appointment with a dermatologist who agreed that the problem might be related to his trip. He prescribed a cream, McKinney recalls, but didn’t offer any other treatment option—even when the spots remained and then got worse. He decided to see a new dermatologist.

“She said, ‘I think you have psoriasis,’” he recalls, after telling his new dermatologist that both over-the-counter and prescription hydrocortisone creams weren’t helping. She also took a biopsy of his skin. “I was like, ‘Psoriasis? What is that?’”

McKinney, 50, of White Settlement, Texas, says he had always had great skin. “I joked with her that I didn’t even have acne as a kid. I was so freaked out about it. I was just devastated.”

McKinney later discovered that his great-grandfather had psoriasis. His own diagnosis came in the early 1990s when he was 30, and as the disease has ebbed and flowed through the years, he’s struggled to come to terms with it and how it affects his daily life. “It’s such an irritating disease. It can be very frustrating,” he says.

McKinney also has to come to terms with another disease that’s he lived with for a number of years, AIDS. He describes himself as “a complicated case for my doctors.”

For his psoriasis, an aggressive phototherapy regimen at his doctor’s office that required an hour’s drive each way helped clear McKinney’s skin for a while. Eventually he bought a home phototherapy unit. “I do get embarrassed every day,” he says, “but I don’t get it all over my body anymore like I used to.”

McKinney is convinced that stress has played a role in his flare-ups. Some of the stress has been job-related, he says, but he also endured an especially tough time when his partner of 15 years died from lymphoma. McKinney retired from work in business management when his health issues—from spinal pain to extreme fatigue—made it too difficult to continue.

Because of his AIDS, McKinney can’t take some of the medications typically used to treat psoriasis. Someday, he hopes, there just might be better treatment options for him and others living with AIDS or other chronic health conditions. “I really wish a pharmaceutical company would help clear up my psoriasis, but not weaken my immune system.”