Comorbidities

Comorbidities are multiple diseases or health conditions in the same individual. One person can have several comorbidities. People with psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis are at a higher risk for developing other chronic (lifelong) comorbidities. This is caused by genetics, inflammation, emotional impacts of the disease and other factors.

Comorbidities of psoriatic disease are also linked to one another. So by having one, your risk for developing another also increases. Treating your psoriatic disease and following a healthy lifestyle can help lower your risk for comorbidities and improve your quality of life.

By being aware of the conditions connected with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, you can watch for symptoms and better understand how your psoriatic disease fits into the overall picture of your health.

**Depression.** People with psoriatic disease are nearly two times as likely to become depressed. Many factors can contribute to the development of depression, including social stigma, strain on relationships and career, frustration with treatment plans and barriers to care. Research shows that the physical effects of chronic inflammation may lead to depression as well. If you have symptoms of depression, reach out to someone you trust or consider speaking with a mental health care provider. Symptoms of depression include:

- Weakness, fatigue or lack of energy
- Eating more or eating less
- Sleeping more or sleeping less
- Feelings of sadness, loneliness or isolation
- Anxiety
- Hopelessness
- Thoughts of suicide

**Heart disease.** Researchers have found that psoriasis can cause heart disease (also called cardiovascular disease). Any level of inflammation can increase your risk for heart disease. But the greater your psoriasis severity, the greater your risk. Heart disease includes many different problems related to the heart and blood vessels. These include:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Abnormal heart beat (arrhythmia)
- Heart valve problems
- Heart failure (congestive heart failure)

**Metabolic syndrome.** Metabolic syndrome is a group of five health problems connected to heart disease and other conditions, such as diabetes. Having psoriatic disease increases your risk for all of these health problems. To be diagnosed with metabolic syndrome, you must have at least three of the following:

- Excess fat around the waistline
- A high level of triglycerides, which are a type of fat found in the blood
- A low level of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) or “good” cholesterol level. This should not be confused with low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or the “bad” cholesterol
- High blood pressure, also known as hypertension
- High fasting blood sugar, which is an early sign of diabetes

Metabolic syndrome can be caused by being overweight and by a lack of physical activity. People with psoriatic disease are more likely to be obese. Obesity and having psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis has been found to increase your risk for type 2 diabetes. Inflammation caused by psoriasis is one of the factors that increases your risk for type 2 diabetes.
Studies show that losing weight can improve psoriatic symptoms, help to make your treatment more effective and reduce your risk for metabolic syndrome.

**Cancer.** People with psoriatic disease have an increased risk for certain cancers such as lymphoma, lung cancer and nonmelanoma skin cancer. There have been studies on how psoriatic disease and different types of treatments are related to cancer risks. Both may be factors.

As with other comorbidities, inflammation may be to blame. But researchers are also studying the possible cancer risks of treatments like biologics that target specific parts of the immune system. It is important for you to get cancer screenings if you are on biologics.

Discuss your expectations of a treatment plan and your concerns about risks with your health care provider, especially if you or members of your family have a history of cancer.

**Other related health conditions**

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- High cholesterol (dyslipidemia)
- Osteoporosis
- Kidney disease
- Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH)
- Liver disease

**What can you do?**

**Treat your psoriatic disease.** Treatments, such as systemics or biologics, work to decrease inflammation, psoriatic symptoms and your related risks. Treating psoriasis can lower your risk for heart disease by decreasing inflammation. Proper treatment has also been shown to improve symptoms of depression and improve overall quality of life. Typically, a specialist, such as a dermatologist or rheumatologist, is best suited to treat psoriatic disease.

**Get regular health checkups.** Your health care provider should test for psoriatic disease comorbidities and their risk factors every year. You can help start the conversation with your primary care provider about the conditions that are linked with psoriatic disease. We recommend that you speak with your health care provider immediately if you experience symptoms described on this fact sheet. Early diagnosis and treatment for conditions, such as heart disease, are important in preventing disease progression.

**Manage stress.** Stress can cause your psoriatic symptoms to flare or worsen. Relaxation and stress management techniques can help with symptoms and reduce your risk for anxiety and depression. Try meditation or other relaxation activities such as yoga or tai chi.

**Follow a healthy lifestyle.** Stay physically active, whether that means brisk walking, playing sports, taking fitness classes or doing whatever activity you enjoy that increases your heart rate. You should also eat a low-fat diet that is high in fruits, vegetables and lean meats or vegetable proteins. We recommend that you not smoke or drink. If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation (one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women).

**For more information**

- American Heart Association: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)
- American Diabetes Association: [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)
- American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)