Comorbidities (related health conditions)

Researchers and doctors now know that psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis (together called psoriatic disease) are diseases of the immune system that can lead to chronic (long-term) inflammation. While psoriasis impacts the skin and psoriatic arthritis impacts joints, this inflammation can also affect other tissues and organs. Because of this, as well as genetic factors, people with psoriatic disease are at a higher risk for developing other health conditions (also called comorbidities).

Recent studies show that people with psoriatic disease are at higher risk for the following comorbidities:

- Certain types of cancer, such as lymphoma and non-melanoma skin cancer
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Depression and anxiety
- Cardiovascular disease including heart attack and stroke
- Erectile dysfunction
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Inflammatory eye disease
- Kidney disease
- Metabolic syndrome (high blood pressure, high blood sugar, extra body fat at the waist and high cholesterol)
- Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NASH)
- Obesity
- Other immune-related conditions such as celiac disease
- Sleep apnea
- Type 2 diabetes

Understanding your risks for comorbidities

While reading a list of comorbidities can be worrisome, it’s important to keep in mind that an increased risk does not mean you are necessarily going to develop those conditions. It’s also helpful to know that each person’s risk of developing a condition is different. Your health care providers can help you screen for potential comorbidities and understand what your unique risks are. There are many factors that go into a person’s risk for developing other conditions including:

- Personal and family health history
- Treatments you’re taking and have taken in the past
- Lifestyle and environmental factors (diet, exercise, smoking, sun exposure, etc.)
- Severity of psoriatic disease
Taking control of your overall health

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. Treating your psoriatic disease and living a healthy lifestyle can lower your risk for comorbidities and help you feel more in control of your health.

Treat your psoriatic disease.

Treatments, such as systemics or biologics, work to decrease inflammation, psoriatic symptoms and your related risks. Studies have shown that 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.

It is important to continue seeing your primary care physician (also called a PCP or general practitioner) for your overall health and screening for comorbidities. You can help start the conversation with your primary care provider about the conditions that are linked with psoriatic disease.

Your PCP will perform a routine physical exam, ask you questions about your mental health and may order blood or other diagnostic tests at regular health check-ups. All of these help to ensure that you are in good health or identify signs or symptoms of health conditions. If you have comorbidities, your PCP may be able to manage it or provide referrals to specialists.

Incorporate healthy habits.

Stay physically active, whether that means taking brisk walks or fitness classes, playing sports or doing whatever activity you enjoy that increases your heart rate. Talk with your health care provider or a dietician about building a diet plan that is rich in nutrients and meets your unique needs. Smoking and drinking are both known to potentially increase psoriatic disease symptoms and increase your risk for comorbidities. Relaxation and stress management techniques can lessen psoriatic disease flares and reduce your risk for anxiety and depression.

What is inflammation?

Inflammation is an important part of the body’s process of fighting off illnesses and injuries. When you get a cut the area quickly becomes hot, red and swollen. These are the signs of inflammation created by your immune system to fight off infection and start the healing process.

When you have psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, your immune system is overactive and can cause chronic inflammation. In addition to causing psoriatic symptoms (plaques on the skin, swelling in joints, etc.) this chronic inflammation can have a negative impact on other tissues and organs.

What should I do next?

Contact our Patient Navigation Center to find providers, prepare for appointments, discuss treatments and get help with accessing treatments [find contact information below].