Diagnosing Psoriasis

There are safe and effective treatment options for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis (together called psoriatic disease). The National Psoriasis Foundation Medical Board published the first U.S. defined treatment targets for psoriasis in 2016. To read about these targets, please visit www.psoriasis.org/treat-to-target. We recommend that you speak with your health care provider about treatment targets that are most appropriate for your psoriatic disease. This will help you to know what to expect from your treatments and set personal goals for managing your psoriasis.

How is psoriasis diagnosed?

Psoriasis is a chronic (lifelong) disease related to the immune system. This means that activity or responses of the immune system play a role in causing the disease. When you have psoriasis, unknown things trigger (cause) your immune system to become overactive. This can result in painful, scaly, inflamed plaques (patches) on your skin.

Your health care provider will diagnose you by examining your skin, nails and scalp for symptoms. He or she might also perform a skin biopsy (the removal of a small skin sample for examination under a microscope).

People with psoriasis are not all alike, and the symptoms can differ from person to person. Skin biopsies and blood tests can generally help to rule out other diseases or conditions. Clues to diagnosing psoriasis include the unique appearance or boundaries of the plaques, type of scales and the areas affected.

You may also consider seeing a dermatologist (a doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of the skin, scalp, hair and nails). Generally, a dermatologist who has experience treating psoriasis can best diagnose it.
How do I find a health care provider?

It is important for you to learn about psoriasis and different treatment options. You should use this knowledge to select a provider who helps to meet your goals for treatment. Because psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis can affect you physically and emotionally, it is important for your medical team to work together. This may include a primary care physician, dermatologist, rheumatologist, mental health provider or others.

If you are not already working with a health care provider or you would like a second opinion, we may be able to direct you to a dermatologist or rheumatologist in your area who specializes in psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis. You can access our Provider Directory by visiting [www.psoriasis.org/health-care-providers/physicians-directory](http://www.psoriasis.org/health-care-providers/physicians-directory).

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).