Psoriasis is a chronic (lifelong) disease related to the immune system. It is not contagious. Plaque psoriasis is the most common type of psoriasis. About 79 percent of people with psoriasis develop plaque psoriasis. It can start at any age.

People with psoriasis may have more than one type of psoriasis. You can have different types of psoriasis at different times.

What are the symptoms?
The symptoms of plaque psoriasis are itchy or painful, scaly, inflamed plaques. In plaque psoriasis, the overactive immune system causes inflammation of the skin and speeds up skin cell growth that causes plaques to develop. For some people, this may appear red with silvery white scales. For others, this may look more like a purple color.

Plaques often appear on the scalp, knees, elbows and torso. However, plaques may appear anywhere on the body.

There are also other symptoms of plaque psoriasis. The plaques generally appear symmetrically (affecting the same areas of the body on the right and left side). You may also experience nail changes like separation of the nail plate from the nail bed, pitting or the appearance of a fungal infection in the nail plate.

What are the triggers?
The following are some known triggers of plaque psoriasis:
- Certain medicines
- Infections
- Injury to the skin
- Starting or stopping medicines
- Stress
- Tobacco or alcohol use

What are the treatment options?
The goal for treating plaque psoriasis is to get your psoriasis plaques down to 1 percent or less of your body surface. How can you tell? The palm of your hand is equal to about 1 percent of your body surface area.

Work with your health care provider to set personal goals for managing your psoriasis. This will help you know what to expect from your treatments. For more information about treatment goals for psoriasis, visit psoriasis.org/treat-to-target. The following are treatments recommended according to treatment standards from The 2017 NPF Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Pocket Guide.
Treatment options for mild psoriasis

If you have mild psoriasis (less than 3 percent of your body is affected), it may be possible to effectively manage your psoriasis with the following treatment options.

Topical treatments may include over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription-strength options:

• OTC topicals can come in many forms, such as ointments, creams, lotions, shampoos or others. They can include moisturizers, bath solutions and scale lifters. These can be purchased without a prescription at major drugstores and supermarkets.

• Prescription-strength topicals are only available if prescribed by your health care provider. These may include topical steroids, vitamin D-based medicines and others.

Phototherapy (also called “light therapy”) uses ultraviolet light to treat psoriasis:

• Ultraviolet light B (UVB) can be done as whole body treatments or targeted treatments, such as laser phototherapy.

• The combination of ultraviolet light A (UVA) and a medicine called psoralen is known as PUVA phototherapy. PUVA is not often offered or used anymore. However, it can be effective for people with severe plaque psoriasis, especially on the hands and feet.

Treatment options for moderate to severe psoriasis

If you have more than 3 percent of your body affected, there are different treatment recommendations.

First-line treatments recommended according to treatment standards include one or a combination of:

• UVB phototherapy may be used alone or in combination with topicals or systemic retinoids, such as Soriatane (acitretin)

• Biologics or oral treatments

• PUVA phototherapy may be an option if UVB phototherapy is not available or appropriate

Second-line options for plaque psoriasis involve combination treatment plans:

• A biologic and an oral treatment

• UVB phototherapy and a biologic

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).