Triggers

The causes of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis (together called psoriatic disease) are not yet fully understood. Researchers believe that a person must have a combination of genes and experience a trigger to develop psoriatic disease. Triggers are factors that produce an immune response in your body. This leads to inflammation, which causes your psoriatic disease to flare and you to experience skin and/or joint symptoms.

The term “flare” can be used to explain two different situations:

• The first time that psoriatic disease symptoms appear
• A worsening of symptoms once psoriatic disease has developed. Flares may last for various amounts of time, causing symptoms to appear on different locations of your body. These symptoms may vary in level of severity.

Triggers vary from person to person. What can be a trigger for one person may not affect another. Understanding what triggers your psoriatic disease to flare can help you manage your disease.

What are some common triggers and how do I reduce them?

Stress is one of the most common triggers for psoriatic disease and can be experienced for many different reasons, including positive and negative events. Stress relief for each person can be very individualized, including engaging in physical activity, taking part in activities and hobbies that you enjoy or meditating. It’s important to find what helps relieve your stress.

Tobacco and alcohol use are known to worsen psoriatic symptoms and increase your risk for comorbidities (related health conditions) such as heart disease. We encourage you to speak with your health care provider if you are considering reducing how much you smoke and drink or quitting. We also recommend discussing how to reduce your risk for comorbidities.

Injuries can be triggers. The worsening of psoriasis symptoms caused by trauma or injury to the skin (for example, a bug bite, sunburn or scratch) is called the Koebner (KEB-ner) phenomenon. Psoriatic arthritis symptoms can flare when a joint is injured as well. Here are some tips and methods to reduce or avoid these triggers:

• Be cautious if you already have active psoriasis symptoms. Try not to scratch or pick at a psoriasis lesion to help prevent worsening of symptoms.
• Use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher), seek shade or wear sun-protective clothing to help prevent sunburns.
• Protect yourself from bug bites when spending time outdoors. Wear long sleeves and pants if appropriate. You can also use insect repellents that do not contain DEET, such as bracelets, clip-ons or DEET-free insect repellant topicals and sprays. Use insect repellents that do not contain DEET, an ingredient which has been shown to worsen psoriasis symptoms.
Illness and infections can worsen psoriatic symptoms. One of the common triggers for children are infections, such as an earache, strep infection, bronchitis, tonsillitis or a respiratory infection. A healthy lifestyle can reduce your risk for illness or infection. This includes having a balanced diet, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding tobacco and alcohol use and getting enough sleep. Other steps you can take to avoid infections includes washing your hands frequently and cooking meats thoroughly. Also, make sure that you speak with your health care provider about getting yearly flu shots and other vaccines as appropriate.

Certain medicines may trigger flares for some people with psoriatic disease. Starting or stopping a medicine, including those used to treat psoriatic disease, can also act as a trigger to worsen psoriatic symptoms. Speak with your health care provider if you are taking any of the following or if you have questions or concerns:

- Anti-malarials, such as Aralen phosphate, Atabrine and Plaquenil
- Tumor necrosis factor-alpha inhibitors such as Cimzia, Enbrel, Humira, Remicade, Simponi and Simponi Aria – although these biologics are commonly used to treat psoriatic disease, in rare instances they can worsen psoriatic symptoms
- Certain blood pressure medicines, including beta blockers, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers and calcium channel blockers
- Interferons
- Lithium
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as indomethacin
- Prednisone and other steroids

Although these are not scientifically proven to be triggers, some people report that diet, changes in weather and allergies may cause psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis flares.

- Long-term studies on the effects of dietary changes on psoriatic disease are still needed. We recommend speaking with your health care provider, a dietitian or nutritionist before starting a weight-loss plan, eliminating foods or adding supplements to your diet.
- Many people experience flares during the winter or summer.
  - Winter can often cause psoriatic flares due to less sunlight and humidity, heated and drier indoor air, stress and illness. It is especially important to keep your skin moisturized and your immune system strong during the winter. For your psoriatic arthritis, you may want to consider using warm compresses or heating pads to help relieve minor aches and pains.
  - Summertime can also cause psoriatic flares because of the increased risk of sunburns and increased humidity. Be sure to use sunscreen to protect your skin and consider finding a water activity, such as swimming or aquatic exercises, that can keep you cool and support your joints.
- If you have seasonal allergies, pollen or grass can cause an immune reaction in your body that makes you sneeze, cough or have other symptoms. This immune reaction may trigger your psoriatic symptoms. However, this connection is not yet clear or fully understood.

What should I do next?

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

6600 SW 92nd Ave., Suite 300 | Portland, OR 97223-7195
800-723-9166 | education@psoriasis.org | www.psoriasis.org/navigationcenter

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