



What is Psoriasis? - April/May 2012

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What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a common condition where there is inflammation of the skin. It develops as patches (plaques) of red, scaly skin. In some people it is mild with small patches and in others many patches which vary in size. It is quite often very 'itchy' where scratching doesn't stop the itch and often makes it worse. Once you develop psoriasis you will tend to have flare-ups throughout life. Psoriasis is not due to an infection; it is not contagious or cancerous

What causes psoriasis?

The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed that a combination of several factors contributes to the development of this disease.

Genetic - Researchers have found 9 gene mutations that may be involved in causing psoriasis. Mutations on genes cause certain cells to function differently. With psoriasis, these mutations seem to largely affect T-helper cells.

Immune - Normally functioning white blood cells produce antibodies to foreign invaders such as bacteria and viruses, they also produce chemicals that aid in healing and fighting infective agents. But with psoriasis, special white blood cells called T-cells become overactive. These T-cells "attack" the skin causing the skin cells to rapidly multiply and stack up on the surface of the skin. Normal skin cells form, mature and slough off every 30 days, with psoriasis this process occurs in 3-6 days. T-cells would normally produce chemicals, which enhance the healing process but due to the abnormally large amount that are produced with psoriasis, they actually cause more inflammation in the skin.

Environmental

Psoriasis can be triggered through skin injuries i.e. abrasions, friction from clothing or rubbing against skin folds, sunburn viral or drug rashes.

Different types of Psoriasis

Chronic Plaque

The rash is made up of patches on the skin, called plaques.

Each plaque usually looks pink or red with overlying flaky, silvery-white scales that feel rough. There is usually a sharp border between the edge of a plaque and normal skin.

The most common areas affected are over elbows and knees, the scalp, nails and the lower back. However, plaques may appear anywhere on the body.

Inverse psoriasis

Found generally in armpits, groin, under the breasts and in skin folds. It appears as smooth, dry areas of skin that are red and inflamed but do not have the scaling associated with plaque psoriasis. Generally more associated with people that are overweight and prone to rubbing and sweating.

Pustular psoriasis

A type of recurring psoriasis characterized by the appearance of pus-filled pimples and sores in clusters. It can be intensely painful, and hospitalization may be required.

Psoriatic arthritis:

Approximately 6% of people with psoriasis suffer from psoriatic arthritis (stiff painful and inflamed joints). The arthritis differs from other forms of arthritis in the pattern of joints that are affected. With psoriatic arthritis an entire finger or toe becomes swollen and inflamed, rather than an individual joint. Common sites are the hands, feet, spine and neck.

Treatments

Creams

Psoriasis is generally treated with drugs that are applied locally on the affected areas of the skin.

- Anti-inflammatory steroid creams that have side-effects: thinning of the skin if overused and if covering large areas of the body can lead to systemic absorption and loss of the body's ability to make its own natural cortisol.
- Non-steroidal creams: Tazarotene & Calcipotriene.
- Natural creams which may help with psoriasis from GreenPeople

Drugs

Methotrexate is an immunosuppressant taken orally or intravenously. This treatment improves the symptoms of the disease, but do not cure it and they have many side effects.

Medications used in the treatment of psoriasis can affect the nutritional status of an individual by interfering with the absorption, metabolism and excretion of nutrients in the food so diet is very important.

Diet

Food allergies are linked to psoriasis and would be wise to think about being tested for any sensitivity - good test FACT at Genova Diagnostics. If you find that you are sensitive to certain foods (Gluten is very common) you can eliminate them from your diet and see if your psoriasis improves.

Healthy eating

- Lots of fresh fruits and vegetables daily, these are loaded with antioxidants that help to control inflammation.
- Small amounts of protein from: fish (omega 3, very important for skin and control of inflammation), seafood, turkey and chicken.
- Whole grains, rice, cereals, pasta, pulses and beans
- Drink plenty of water

Avoid

- Fried, convenient or processed foods - promote inflammation
- Refined carbohydrates & sugary foods
- Red meat also promotes inflammation, try and stick to white meat.
- Alcohol, fizzy drinks, caffeine consumption

Deal with your Stressors - if you find that something is causing you excessive amounts of stress talk it through with a Therapist and learn how you can find new ways of dealing with your stress.

Even if you can't make all the changes, small tweaks (eating more vegetables, exchanging white bread and rice for whole grains, eliminating processed food) and dealing with your Stressors, will help to improve your health.