

Psoriasis: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Psoriasis (say "suh-RY-uh-sus") is a long-term skin problem that causes thick, white, silvery, or red patches on the skin. The patches may be small or large, and they occur most often on the knees, elbows, scalp, hands, feet, or lower back.

The skin may be scaly. If the condition is severe, your skin can become itchy and tender. Psoriasis also can be embarrassing if the patches are on visible areas.

You can treat psoriasis with good care at home and with medicine from your doctor. You may put medicine on your skin and take pills or have shots to stop the redness and swelling. Your doctor also may suggest ultraviolet light treatments.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- If your doctor prescribes medicine, use it exactly as prescribed. Follow your doctor's advice for sunlight or ultraviolet light treatment. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Protect your skin:
 - Keep your skin moist. After bathing, put an ointment, cream, or lotion on your skin while it is still damp. This seals in moisture. Use over-the-counter products that your doctor suggests. These may include Cetaphil, Lubriderm, or Eucerin. Petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) and vegetable shortening (such as Crisco) also work.
 - If you have psoriasis on your scalp, use a shampoo with salicylic acid, such as Neutrogena T/Sal.
 - Avoid harsh skin products, such as those that contain alcohol.
 - Cover your skin in cold weather.
 - Try to prevent sunburn. Although short periods of sun exposure reduce psoriasis in most people, too much sun can damage the skin and cause skin cancer. In addition, sunburns can trigger psoriasis. Use sunscreen on areas of your skin that do not have psoriasis. Make sure to use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher. Use it every day, even when it is cloudy.
 - Take care to avoid accidents such as cutting or scraping your skin. An injury to the skin can cause psoriasis patches to form anywhere on the body, including the area of the injury.
 - Avoid tight shoes, clothing, watchbands, and hats. These may irritate your skin.
 - Use a vaporizer or humidifier to add moisture to your bedroom. Follow the directions for cleaning the machine.
- Try making one or more changes to your daily habits to help with managing your psoriasis. For example:
 - Try to control stress and anxiety. They may cause psoriasis to appear suddenly or can make symptoms worse.
 - If you smoke, think about quitting. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines.
 - If you drink, limit or reduce the amount of alcohol you drink.
 - If you are overweight, see if you can lose some weight.
- Seek support from family and friends. Talk to a counselor or other professional if you feel sad about your condition and need more help.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have signs of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
 - Red streaks leading from the area.
 - Pus draining from the area.
 - A fever.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have swelling, stiffness, or pain in your joints.
- You do not get better as expected.

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