

Psoriasis

*"Say to him: Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!"
1 Samuel 25:6*

Psoriasis is a chronic skin condition, which appears as red, scaly patches on the skin. These patches occur because skin cells, which are constantly replacing themselves, build up too quickly. It is not contagious, but it can be very unsightly. While there are five types of psoriasis, the most common type is plaque psoriasis, which will be the type highlighted in this article. These patches can appear on any part of the body. This condition can be mild, or severe enough to interfere with a person's quality of life.

Symptoms will come and go, and vary from person to person. They can occur anywhere, including under the nails.

Symptoms may include:

Red, raised patches covered with silver scales

Skin which is dry, cracked, and might bleed

Pain, burning, and itching

Nails which are thickened or ridged

Joints which become swollen and stiff

It is believed that psoriasis is an autoimmune problem, with T cells (which normally attack and fight infection) attacking healthy skin instead. Researchers are not sure why the T cells act in this way.

According to the Mayo Clinic, the following are triggers which may cause the first outbreak, or a reoccurrence:

An infection, especially strep or thrush

Skin injury, such as a cut, bug bite, or bad sunburn

Stress

Cold temperatures

Smoking and/or heavy alcohol use

Some medications, including lithium (bipolar disorder), beta blockers (high blood pressure), anti-malarial drugs, and iodides

While anyone can develop psoriasis, the following risk factors increase the chances:

A family history of psoriasis

HIV positive

Dry skin

High stress levels

Obesity

Cigarette smoking

Your primary care physician can treat mild cases. However, for worsening symptoms or a severe case, a dermatologist is the type of doctor who specializes in skin conditions. Treatment may include creams or ointments, Vitamin D, medications, coal tar, moisturizers, and light therapy.

A daily bath with lukewarm water and bath oil, salts, or special oatmeal can help remove the scaly patches. Use only mild soap with oil added to it. Right after the bath, it's important to moisturize before the skin dries completely. Direct sunlight exposure for short amounts of time can help, but protect the healthy skin with sunscreen. Try to identify triggers such as smoking, alcohol, and stress, and avoid them as much as possible.

Help yourself by learning everything you can about your condition. See a doctor, and consider joining a support group.

More info: www.psoriasis.org

or www.dermatology.about.com/od/psoriasisbasics/a/psorcause.htm