

Psoriasis

What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a long-term skin condition. It causes thick silvery scales and dry, red areas. It can be itchy or painful. It can start at any age. Psoriasis is not contagious. You cannot get it from touching someone who has psoriasis.

What causes it?

The exact cause of psoriasis is not known. It may be related to skin cells that grow too fast and to the body's immune system. Psoriasis develops when a person's immune system sends signals that tell skin cells to grow too fast. These new skin cells form in days instead of weeks. The body does not get rid of these extra skin cells. The skin cells pile up on the skin, causing thick, scaly areas to appear.



Most often, people who get psoriasis have one or more family members (genetic) who have it. Something called a trigger normally causes psoriasis to appear, or get worse.

Common triggers:

- A stressful event.
- An illness such as strep throat.
- Injury to the skin. This could include a cut, scrape, scratch, bug bite, or bad sunburn
- Certain medicines
- Cold, dry weather

Where might it appear?

Psoriasis can appear anywhere on the skin. It can also appear on the scalp and the nails. If it is on the nail it generally causes tiny pits. The nail may come loose from the skin or get thicker. It could also cause parts of the nail fall off.

What are the types and symptoms of psoriasis?

There are 5 types of psoriasis. Your doctor will tell you which type your child has:

- **Plaque psoriasis** is the most common type. It causes raised, red patches of skin called plaques. The patches may be covered with a silvery-white coating called scale. The patches may itch and be painful and can appear anywhere on the skin. Most often the patches appear on the knees, elbows, lower back and scalp. There may be only a few or many patches of plaque psoriasis.
- **Guttate psoriasis** often shows up after an illness, such as strep throat or other infection. This type causes small, red spots that can appear anywhere on the skin. The spots may go away in a few weeks with no treatment or remain even after the infection goes away.
- **Pustular psoriasis** appears on the hands and feet. The skin looks red and swollen with pus-filled bumps. The skin may be sore and painful where the bumps appear. Patients with this type of psoriasis often have a fever and feel sick.
- **Inverse psoriasis** causes smooth red patches of skin. The red patches show up where skin touches other skin, such as the armpits, groin, buttocks, and genitals. The skin may be very sore.

Types (continued)

- **Erythrodermic psoriasis** causes the skin to look like it is burned. The skin on the body turns bright red, and may be very itchy and painful.

How is it treated?

There is no cure for psoriasis, but it can be kept under control with therapy. There is no one treatment that works for all patients. Your health care provider will select a treatment(s) based on your child's needs. To help control psoriasis one or more of these treatments can be used:

- **Topical prescription medicines:** These medicines are put on the skin or scalp. These medicines may come as creams, lotions, ointments, foam based or shampoos.
- **Phototherapy (light therapy):** Ultraviolet (UV) light, which is found in natural sunlight, may be used. The skin is exposed to controlled amounts of natural sunlight. There are also special light bulbs that shine fake (artificial) ultraviolet light to help control psoriasis.
- **Systemic Medicines (oral prescription medicines):** These medicines are taken by mouth and swallowed.
- **Biologic Medicines (injected or infused prescription medicines):** These medicines are given by a shot or into a vein (IV).

How do I care for my child's skin at home?

Besides the treatment plan from the health care provider, caring for skin at home may help the way your child's skin looks and feels. Use skin products that are fragrance-free. Read labels carefully. Unscented products may still have fragrance added. Ask for Health Facts sheet #1484, Product List for Atopic Dermatitis.

- **Bathing.** Bathe your child once a day in warm water for at most 10 to 15 minutes. A daily bath helps to remove scale. Use mild and gentle soap products in the bath. Use soap only in areas of the skin that get dirty, such as the groin, under the neck, and in the armpits.
- **Moisturize.** After a bath, pat your child's skin gently with a towel. Do not dry the skin completely. Moisturizers work best when you put them on damp skin. Put it on as quickly as possible after the bath. This helps trap the moisture in and keep the skin from becoming dry. Moisturizers should be used at least two times a day, even if the skin does not feel dry. Ointment and cream moisturizers work better than lotions.
- **Fingernails.** Keep your child's fingernails cut short. This will help avoid injury to the skin from scratching itchy skin. Socks can be worn on the hands at night to avoid injury from scratching while asleep.
- **Avoid triggers.** Watch for triggers that may make your child's psoriasis worse. Try to take steps to prevent and avoid those triggers.

Children with psoriasis can go to school, daycare and other activities.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has:

- Weeping or oozing (leaking fluid) areas of the skin.
- Crusting or scabby areas of the skin.
- Signs of infection. This includes redness or swelling that increases or if there is pus.
- Special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.