Psoriasis Explained

by LARA WYATT

What Is Psoriasis?

So, where did this condition begin? According to the National Psoriasis Foundation, the term psoriasis was penned by Greek physician Galen, who was around between 133-200 A.D. However, some people believe that what Galen was referring to when he used the term psoriasis may actually be what we call eczema these days.

However, we know eczema and psoriasis are two conditions that can be quite easy to mix up depending on the severity of a flare-up. At the very least, knowing that someone as far back as 200 A.D. had been using the term psoriasis acknowledges it's no new thing!

So, what is this condition exactly? Psoriasis is an inflammatory skin condition, which no one really has a 100% accurate or scientifically proven explanation for. What is agreed is that psoriasis is connected to your immune system.

Psoriasis and the Role of the Immune System

Your immune system is supposed to stop bad things from entering your body and causing you to get sick. It's supposed to fend off foreign matters that enter your systems, like viruses or chemicals.

So, if your immune system is performing correctly, it will attack invaders that present themselves in your body to do harm, and they destroy them. However, in those who have psoriasis, the immune system attacks the wrong thing and instead causes inflammation and causes a rapid growth of skin cells, which results in a flare-up.

Psoriasis is a very interesting condition — not so much for those who are suffering from it right now and just want it to go away — but when you're in the frame of mind to explore it, it's incredible just how many variations of this condition there are. With many conditions, there's one way you know you've got it, and that's it, but psoriasis can present itself in many different forms.

Causes

Psoriasis is a condition that is thought to affect approximately 125 million people worldwide. So if you ever feel like no one could understand what you're dealing with, and why me, world, why me? There are so many other people out there dealing with a similar issue.

It is considered to be inherited, as well as brought about by environmental factors. People who have a history of psoriasis in their family are more likely to suffer from this condition some time during their life than those who don't have any family history with the condition.

What Are the Different Types?

There are five types of psoriasis, and they are plaque psoriasis, inverse psoriasis, pustular psoriasis, guttate psoriasis, erythrodermic psoriasis, and psoriatic arthritis. Below you will learn more about the different types in-depth.

Plaque Psoriasis

Plaque psoriasis is known to be the most common type of psoriasis. This type presents itself as red, inflamed areas, that tend to be covered in a flakey buildup of skin.

Unfortunately, to go with the redness, these patches can also be itchy and painful. Often, these patches can appear on the knees or elbows, and they're also known to appear on the scalp or your back.

Inverse Psoriasis

This type specifically targets the fold areas of the skin, such as places like under the arms, groin, and under the breasts. As you can imagine, having something like psoriasis in areas that tend to rub, like the folds of skin, can be incredibly painful.

To make matters worse, people who suffer from inverse psoriasis tend to suffer from other types of psoriasis, like plaque psoriasis, as well. Unlike plaque psoriasis, inverse psoriasis isn't dry. It tends to appear more as a red, shiny area, that tends to take over larger areas of the body.

Pustular Psoriasis

If you're seeing raised white bumps on your skin, they could be a sign that you're dealing with pustular psoriasis. The bumps appear white as they're filled with a white fluid made up of white blood cells. Around these raised bumps, the skin tends to be quite red and inflamed.

This type is a lot less common, with plaque psoriasis being right up there as the most common type that people suffer from.

Guttate Psoriasis

This type generally appears on the upper body, arms, or legs. It usually presents itself as small pink spots over a relatively large area of the body. It's pretty uncommon and is generally seen in children or people under 30 years of age.

Erythrodermic Psoriasis

This one's a rare one, but it can affect 3% of people who have psoriasis at some point in there life – whether it's just the once, or several times. When erythrodermic psoriasis presents itself, it tends to take over a lot more of the body than other types – and it's a lot more intense.

If you look up some of the photos, you'll see it can get very red and inflamed, and often large amounts of skin will shed at one time. This has been described as sheets of skin flaking off, instead of just small amounts of flakey skin as seen in the plaque type.

Psoriatic Arthritis

Finally, there's another condition that can end up affecting people who are prone to psoriasis. Psoriatic arthritis generally appears in people sometime between the ages of 30 and 50.

It's an inflammatory form of arthritis that can cause pain and swelling in the joints. There are ways to manage psoriatic arthritis, including medications, but there are also the general well-being tips that can help ease the pain, including exercising and getting enough sleep.

Triggers

The environmental factors that can trigger psoriasis flare-ups include stress, skin injuries, infection, and medications. Remember, there's still no set rules around which triggers cause the condition, and which are just common coincidences. However, some psoriasis triggers that are always mentioned when the condition is talked about.

Stress

Stress is an interesting environmental trigger surrounding the condition. Not only can being under stress bring about a flare-up, but knowing you have psoriasis can be stressful in itself, causing psoriasis to get worse. It's a bit of a vicious cycle.

Stress can be anything from suffering from anxiety in everyday situations, through to a traumatic life event, or suffering from a post-traumatic stress disorder. Studies do show that there is an intrinsic link between suffering from stress and having a psoriasis flare-up.

Skin Injuries

There's something called Koebner's Phenomenon, which was founded by German dermatologist Heinrich Koebner way back in 1876. What he discovered was that in some people who have psoriasis, when they injure themselves in the form of cuts, scrapes, grazes, or the likes, they may find that they end up getting a flare-up.

You may not even know that this is what you're dealing with as sometimes psoriasis flare-ups, thanks to skin injuries, may take a long time to appear. Even then, there's no distinct look to the flare-up you may get. It could look like a line of psoriasis, or it may take over a large area of skin. There's no one size fits all, unfortunately.

Infection

Something as simple as strep throat is thought to be linked to flare-ups in some people. Guttate psoriasis is a type that quite commonly appears after someone has suffered from strep throat.

It's even been heard of (although there's not a lot of research done around this area yet), that some people living with psoriasis have had their tonsils removed in the hopes that they won't suffer from flare-ups caused by strep throat anymore.

According to the National Psoriasis Foundation, your immune system reacts to the invading foreign objects when you have strep throat by increasing the number of immune cells in your tonsils. In doing this, some of these cells can head to your skin, which, as we mentioned before, can rapidly produce skin cells causing flare-ups.

Medications

Different types of medications are thought to trigger psoriasis outbreaks.

- **Beta blockers**, for example, are a type of drug that helps people with such conditions as heart conditions and anxiety disorders. However, these type of drugs are also linked to causing psoriasis flare-ups, or at the very least, not helping them to calm down.
- **Medications with lithium** in them are also connected with psoriasis flare-ups. These types of drugs are often prescribed to people with bipolar disorder.
- **Antibiotics** are another type of drug that has connections to psoriasis. Although not all antibiotics are thought to bring about psoriasis, it's a good idea always to remind your doctor that you do deal with psoriasis so they can try to avoid giving you anything that may trigger a flare-up.
- **Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** are another type of drug that are connected with psoriasis. Which is a bit unfortunate considering they're often used by people who have psoriasis. NSAIDs are things like aspirin, ibuprofen, and diclofenac — things that are often used when it comes to

painful inflammatory conditions.

Mental Health and Psoriasis

As you can see from the list of medications and stress-related triggers, mental health seems to play a very key part in many people who suffer from this condition. This can either be referred to as part of the aftermath of psoriasis or before it's occurred.

It can also play a huge toll on people's self-esteem, which has also been connected with anxiety disorders. Often, the connection between depression and psoriasis is referred to, and this could be something that results from dealing with psoriasis, but as we've mentioned before, it could be to do with the medication you may be taking.

Inheritance

As we mentioned earlier on, it's thought that psoriasis is a condition that people inherit from their family bloodline. I know that there's at least one instance of someone in my family having psoriasis, so this connection rings true in my experience.

According to Healthline, the following statistics are associated with inheritance:

- A parent has psoriasis, and the child has approximately 10% chance of suffering from psoriasis.
- Both parents have psoriasis, and the child has a chance of approximately 50%.
- Your sibling has psoriasis; you're four to six times more likely to suffer from psoriasis compared to the general population.

The good thing about it potentially being an inherited condition is that psoriasis is not contagious. The fact that it looks like a rash tends to raise the question of whether you can give it to anyone else, but rest assured you can't.

Before psoriasis was commonly referred to, it often was confused with leprosy, which is a mildly contagious disease.

Treatment Options

Although there's still no cure for the condition, we've come a long way regarding how we can treat and manage it.

All you have to do is walk into a natural product store, and you'll find a vast array of items that claim to be able to calm psoriasis flare-ups. Trust me, and I've tried all that I can get my hands on. Luckily, there are many options to trial with some giving some decent results.

Treatment will differ depending on your skin and the type of psoriasis you're dealing with, but here's just a small selection of different types of psoriasis treatments to consider.

Coal Tar

Coal tar is a treatment you don't need a prescription for. You can find it on the shelves of most pharmacies.

The main downside to coal tar is the smell. Some people love it, and some people hate it. My view is that if it does the trick, I don't care what it smells like.

What I like about coal tar is you can use it as an excuse for enforced self-care. Tip a few caps of the liquid into a warm bath, and just chill out, soak, and relax.

What the coal tar is supposed to do is slow the rapid growth of skin cells associated with psoriasis, and it's also supposed to reduce the redness that people suffer from.

Coconut Oil

The moral of the story when it comes to coconut oil and psoriasis is keep your skin super moisturized all of the time.

Coconut oil is a great product to use as it applies a lot of moisture, and your skin can use as much as it needs. Keeping your skin moisturized means your skin dries out less, which really helps reduce the flake of the overproduced skin cells, especially seen in plaque psoriasis.

Steroid Ointments

This one is not for everyone. Applying steroids to your skin can be viewed as being quite damaging.

I have steroid ointments on hand prescribed by my doctor, and I tend to use them either when natural items haven't quite worked as expected, or when I can feel myself getting stressed out about the amount of psoriasis on my body. Also, I know that my stress can make my psoriasis worse, so I like to get rid of it fast, even if I know steroids aren't the best for my body.

From my experience, steroid ointments are incredibly fast-acting and clear up my skin to the point of being manageable with natural items. There are so many different steroid variants, and it's best to talk to your doctor about the severity of your psoriasis, and whether steroids are a good option for you.

Sunlight

Sunlight is a treatment that needs to be watched incredibly carefully. For example, don't get sun-burnt as this can cause psoriasis.

Also, don't go out in the sun if you've applied steroid creams as this can cause serious skin damage. However, a small amount of sunlight exposure can help some people's psoriasis. Just make sure you monitor it closely.

The Bottom Line...

There's still so much to understand about what psoriasis is. Even though we've known of its existence since way, way, way before any of us were even born – it's important for us to keep learning about psoriasis.

Psoriasis is one of those elusive conditions that we learn more and more about every day, and we can't pinpoint an accurate reason as to why some people have to deal with the condition and others don't.

Although all of the information we provide right now may not ring true over the coming years, at least we're doing absolutely everything we can to keep informed and educated about the research's progress, so we know what to try and what to steer clear of, for now at least.

It's vital we keep talking to our doctors and keep absorbing as much knowledge as we can to ensure we can lead the highest quality life with psoriasis, and keep staying positive. It can get hard, and painful, but psoriasis is a condition, not a way of life. We just have to manage it.