Does Psoriasis Qualify as an Autoimmune Disease?

by LARA WYATT

Is Psoriasis an Autoimmune Disease?

Is psoriasis an autoimmune disease? First of all, it is important to understand what an autoimmune disease actually is. To sum it up simply, an autoimmune disease is a condition where your body mistakes healthy cells for foreign cells and attacks them. There are many different types of autoimmune diseases that attack cells in different parts of your body. What makes psoriasis one of these is the fact that your immune system mistakes healthy skin cells for foreign cells and attacks them, causing skin cells to regenerate at a much faster rate than required. Skin cells usually last about a month before they are replaced, but this process is quickened due to psoriasis, and new skin cells are produced in just days rather than a month. This results in a buildup of skin cells, which psoriasis sufferers may recognize as plaques.

That's the succinct answer, but we can dig deeper to really see what happens when the immune system attacks skin cells and find ways to effectively treat the condition.

What Causes Psoriasis?

Specifically, there are two types of cells that cause psoriasis. There is a white blood cell that produces antibodies that destroy normal skin cells, and there is also a T-cell that produces more protein than is needed. When both of these two processes are off kilter it affects the growth of skin cells, leaving sufferers with a psoriasis flare-up and inflammation of the skin.

What causes the white blood cells and T-cells to become overactive is not completely clear. What we do know is that psoriasis has many triggers that can lead to a flare-up. Michelle A. Lowes, Mayte Suárez-Fariñas, and James G. Krueger recognize that injury to the skin, infection, and even medications may cause the immune system to become overactive. For example, when there is an injury to the skin, skin cells are killed and T-cells are activated as response, which produces the proteins that are found in psoriasis.

So, how can it be treated? There are many types of treatments, but topical therapy, phototherapy, and systemic therapy are the most common methods.

Topical Therapy

Topical therapy for psoriasis involves treatments you can apply directly onto the skin. Treatments like prescribed steroid medications and retinoids are included in these types of treatments. Coal tar, salicylic acid, and synthetic vitamin D treatments also fall into this category.

Phototherapy

Phototherapy is used for several skin conditions and involves the use of ultraviolet (UV) light to help calm red and inflamed skin. There are different types of phototherapy to consider, and make sure you discuss with your doctor

before you undergo any treatment.

The types include narrowband ultraviolet B or broadband ultraviolet B, which can be used for plaque and guttate psoriasis. Targeted ultraviolet B is better for localized psoriasis, or there is also psoralen plus ultraviolet A, which is better for palmoplantar psoriasis.

Sunshine and tanning beds also fall into this category, but these often do not work without being used in conjunction with another treatment.

Systemic Therapy

These types of treatments feature medication that is prescribed when you have a more severe form of psoriasis. Often systemic therapy is suggested when other ways to treat the skin condition have not worked. They can include treatments like retinoids, methotrexate, cyclosporine, and biologics. These are all things you should discuss with your doctor as systemic therapy can have considerable side effects and it is important to be aware and prepared.

Alternative Treatments

There are other types of treatments to consider to effectively manage psoriasis, including natural options you often do not require a prescription for. Some options are pre-emptive measures to try and reduce stress and other triggers, so you do not have to suffer with the flare-ups to begin with.

Fish Oil

The fatty omega 3 in fish oil is said to be able to soften dry skin and reduce the symptoms of mild psoriasis. Try incorporating fish or fish oil supplements in your diet to help maintain skin that is less prone to psoriasis flare-ups.

Moisturize

It’s essential to keep vulnerable skin moisturized with a non-fragrance moisturizer. Dry skin is prone to cracking, and we know skin injuries can trigger psoriasis. Even when you are not dealing with a flare-up, keep your skin moisturized during the day to limit the chances of the skin condition being triggered.

In Conclusion

Understanding what is happening when your body suffers from a psoriasis flare-up can help to take the panic out of the experience. There’s less mystery around why your skin has reacted in this way, and you can quickly identify what has happened. Knowing your skin may be reacting to a skin injury, or perhaps you had an infection, and your skin has reacted with a flare-up of psoriasis can help you make informed decisions about how you will treat the latest outbreak. Just like all the other organs in your body, monitor your skin’s wellbeing on a regular basis to stay on top of your psoriasis. If a flare-up should occur, stay calm, do not panic, and make sure you talk to your doctor about the best way to treat it early.