



5 Early Signs of Psoriasis

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How Does Psoriasis Start?

It has been estimated that 8 million people in the U.S. suffer from psoriasis. Worldwide, 2% to 3% of the population is thought to have psoriasis. This equates to 125 million people globally. So, how does psoriasis start? We'll get to that.

If you are wondering if you may be one of the many people who suffer from psoriasis, there are certain things that you can watch for so that you can discuss it with your healthcare provider.

How Psoriasis Starts

Psoriasis is an autoimmune condition; this means that the immune system is functioning irregularly. The T-cells that typically attack harmful bacteria and viruses start attacking the skin cells. This causes the body to produce skin cells more rapidly. Eventually, the cells pile on top of each other, and we see psoriasis.

We don't know specifically what causes psoriasis, but we know that certain risk factors may increase the likelihood of developing psoriasis:

- Genetics – having a relative with psoriasis.
- Elevated stress levels.
- Heavy alcohol intake.
- Smoking.
- Infections, such as strep throat.
- Weather – especially cold, dry weather.
- Being on certain medications, such as lithium, prednisone and hydroxychloroquine.

Top Warning Signs of Psoriasis

There are many warning signs of psoriasis. Some of the symptoms, like the characteristic rash, are easy to detect. Others can be a bit more confusing because they can also be characteristics of other diseases.

1. Rashes

Rashes are, undoubtedly, the most common warning sign of psoriasis. In fact, 80% to 90% of people with psoriasis develop rashes. They develop them because the immune system causes skin cells to produce rapidly, causing the characteristic of red or silver scales. In those with darker skin tones, the scales will manifest as purple or dark brown patches. Before the patches develop, you may notice raised itchy areas of inflammation.

2. Scaly Plaques on the Scalp

Scalp psoriasis symptoms vary based on the severity of symptoms. Some people have mild symptoms, which causes slight, fine scaling; others have significant thick and crusted sores.

In fact, scalp psoriasis is only part of the picture. Those who suffer from plaques on the scalp may also notice the following:

- Flakes that resemble dandruff.
- Dry scalp.
- Itching.
- Burning scalp.
- Sore scalp.

3. Hair Loss

Hair loss often goes together with psoriasis, especially scalp psoriasis. Many people believe that psoriasis causes hair loss. However, psoriasis is not known to cause hair loss – when hair loss occurs, it is typically due to excessive scratching of the scalp. It can also be caused by the stress of having psoriasis, as well as some of the medications that are associated with psoriasis treatment.

4. Problems With the Fingernails and Toenails

Nail psoriasis is its own subtype and can occur with or without plaque psoriasis. It is called palmoplantar psoriasis. Approximately 12% to 16% of people with psoriasis have some type of involvement with their hands and feet.

Nail psoriasis causes the nails to become crumbly, discolored and dented. Eventually, the nails may lift from the nailbeds. It is more common on the fingernails than the toenails and can be an indicator of psoriatic arthritis.

5. Aching Joints

Many people with psoriasis also suffer from psoriatic arthritis (PsA); in fact, 10% to 30% of people suffer from it. Psoriatic arthritis causes painful, swollen joints. PsA is important to recognize early in the disease state because it can cause significant damage to the affected joints.

What to Do If You Suspect You Have Psoriasis

If you suspect that you have psoriasis, the first step is to contact your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can diagnose your condition and refer you to the proper specialist, such as a dermatologist or a rheumatologist.

There are various treatment options for psoriasis. Topical treatments, oral treatments and biologic treatments are all available and can be used alone or in conjunction with another treatment. In addition, phototherapy can be prescribed; this treatment involves the use of special lights focused on the affected area.

The Bottom Line

Though suffering from psoriasis can seem isolating, painful and embarrassing, please consider seeking out help from your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can diagnose and begin a treatment plan. You can also seek out fellowship from other people with psoriasis by finding a group message board or Facebook group.

Remember – you are never alone!