Treating Psoriasis

by BRENDA VANTA

Is cold or hot therapy best?

Weather can affect many health conditions, and psoriasis is one of them.

Many people experience improvements in skin lesions during the humid summer, while cold, dry weather will typically trigger flare-ups. Psoriatic arthritis also improves during warm weather as the heat can help decrease joint inflammation and swelling, though this is not always the case. Sometimes both skin and joint problems can ameliorate during the winter, and aggravate in the summer.

The best way to deal with weather changes is to keep track of your symptoms and see what feels good for you.

If your symptoms improve during the hot, summer days

If hot weather does help your joint problems make sure to spend some time outdoors during the summer. Just be careful to avoid too much exposure to the sun and risk sunburns, which can trigger skin lesions. During the cold season take warm baths on a regular basis. These can help decrease swelling and joint pain, improve your mobility and range of motion, and relax the muscles.

If you don't enjoy warm baths take instead a long, warm or hot shower in the morning. There's also warm paraffin wax that you can ask for at spas or use at home, or try a hot stone massage next time you see your massage therapist.

Heating pads are available in most drug stores and can be heated in hot water or the microwave if they are not of the electric variety. You can also use a towel heated in a dryer and wrap it around the painful joint.

Body temperature also rises when you exercise, so it can be beneficial to follow a fitness plan or just go for a walk or even a light jog.

To prevent burns don't apply heat for long periods of time, and check your skin frequently for redness.

If your joints like cold treatments

If you feel better during the winter or using cold treatments, you can use them as often as you would like. Spend time outdoors in the winter, as cold blocks the nerves that send the sensation of pain to the brain and therefore can numb the painful areas as well as any inflammation and swelling.

One of the easiest methods is to apply an ice pack or other cold bag to the painful joint. If you don't have ice, you can use a bag of frozen vegetables. Wrap a towel around your joint before applying the cold packs. Certain ointments and lotions will also give the sensation of cold – often these creams use menthol or eucalyptus – which you can apply a few times daily.

To avoid frostbite don’t use cold packs for more than 15 minutes at a time, and let your skin return to its normal temperature before applying another cold pack.

Other considerations

Try to alternate cold and hot applications as this combination can prove effective. Keep in mind that hot and cold applications don’t replace drug therapy, which should be followed as recommended by your doctor.