Psoriasis and Pregnancy

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Managing Your Psoriasis While Pregnant

Psoriasis, like pregnancy, is a very individual experience, and it's impossible to know just how your symptoms will react with the physiological changes you experience while pregnant.

The good news is that your condition won't interfere with your ability to conceive, or your ability to carry your baby to full term. But while psoriasis symptoms won't threaten your pregnancy, certain skin treatments can endanger the fetus. You may need to make some important changes for a safe pregnancy and a happy postpartum life.

How Symptoms Impact Pregnancy

Fortunately, up to 60% of women will experience fewer or less severe psoriasis symptoms during their pregnancy, especially during the first trimester. In particular, lesions tend to whiten and become less prominent, and the itch will diminish along with the plaques. One reason for the relief may be a spike in cortisone: the body produces more of this anti-inflammatory hormone, which is known to calm psoriasis flares, during pregnancy.

But for some, psoriasis symptoms can merge with pregnancy discomforts to make for a particularly uncomfortable experience. For instance, skin itch can aggravate insomnia and other sleep issues, while extra weight can put more pressure on sore joints in patients with psoriatic arthritis. If you need to continue to treat your psoriasis while you're pregnant, you will need to take some extra care and attention to sidestep potential problems.

Treating Psoriasis When You're Expecting

Fortunately, you don't have to suffer with painful and itchy skin until the baby is born. Most topical treatments have not been shown to cause birth defects, but your doctor will likely recommend you go easy on the steroid applications, just to be safe. On the other hand, systemic treatments like methotrexate, oral retinoids and biologics are off-limits from the very beginning: you'll have to stop taking these powerful drugs before you try to conceive, and since they can pass through blood and through breast milk, you cannot resume taking them until you decide to stop nursing,

Considering your medication limitations, you may have to adopt a multi-pronged approach to psoriasis flares while you're pregnant. Luckily, there are several treatments available, but that doesn't mean you can throw caution to the wind:

- **UV therapy** – Natural sunlight can help calm your inflammation, and more targeted light therapy in a clinical environment can deliver even greater benefits. However, phototherapy can reduce your folic acid level, so it's important to replenish your stores with a supplement in order to protect against spinal cord and brain defects in your baby.
- **Moisturizers** – Sometimes the simplest measures are the most effective. Using a good, thick moisturizer after you get out of the bath or shower each day can lock in your skin's vital oils and ward off dry patches

that can flare up.

- **Exfoliants** – Certain exfoliating medications, such as urea and salicylic acid, can be used in small quantities over small areas of skin. Your doctor will determine a safe concentration of the medication, and probably provide some specific instructions for safe use.

Stress can be a major trigger for psoriasis and pregnancy can bring a lot of stress in various forms. From physically draining activities to emotional turmoil, you will face challenges in the months ahead, and it’s crucial that you have a plan in place to manage those events. Be sure to take time for yourself, and if you need to, invest in a guided meditation course or a private counselor to help you keep discomforts in check.