Psoriasis in Children and Babies

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Spotting and Treating Psoriasis in Kids

Psoriasis in children is often misdiagnosed – lesions in children may not resemble the psoriatic plaques seen in adults. Babies are less likely to develop psoriasis, however it does occasionally occur. Consult with your health care provider so that a correct diagnosis may be made if your child has a persistent rash or other type of skin change.

Signs of Psoriasis in Children

Symptoms of psoriasis in a child include:

- Discolored and rough fingernails or toenails.
- Thick, shiny, scaly patches may appear on the scalp. These patches may initially look like cradle cap, however they are thicker, and persist despite your efforts to get rid of them.
- Bright red areas between the fingers and toes, on the groin, or between the buttocks. Unlike diaper rash, the areas may be shiny and not respond to treatment.
- Lesions similar to the psoriatic plaques that adults get may appear. They are most common on the trunk, arms, and legs and are often crusty, scaly, and itchy and silver colored.
- The skin may crack, and the skin surrounding the lesions may be inflamed and red.

Children may also develop psoriasis lesions that look like small red dots. This is called guttate psoriasis and is more common in children than adults. Guttate psoriatic lesions most commonly appear on the trunk.

Psoriasis often develops within a week or two after an infection. Strep throat is the infection that is most commonly followed by a psoriasis outbreak. Ear infections, strep throat, bronchitis, and upper respiratory infections occur prior to the onset of lesions in one third to one half of children affected.

Some children develop psoriatic lesions to an area which has previously been injured. For example, if your child has previously sustained a burn, psoriatic lesions may develop there. The appearance of psoriatic lesions after an injury is known as the “Koebner phenomenon.”

I Have Psoriasis – Will My Children Get It Too?

If you have psoriasis your children do have a higher than average risk of developing it at some point in their lives, as there is a genetic component to the disease.

If one parent has the condition, there is a one in ten change that your children will develop it. If both parents have the condition, the chances of your children getting psoriasis increases to one in two.

If you have a baby or child with psoriasis, you may be reluctant to use strong prescription medicines on them.

Many of the medications used to treat psoriasis have not been approved for use by infants and children, and if your child is very young, you may be concerned that your child may accidentally ingest topical prescription creams by licking or chewing on their skin.

Home remedies are an important part of a treatment plan, regardless of whether or not you use conventional treatments for your child.

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Dietary Approaches to Preventing and Treating Psoriasis in Children

A healthy diet is an important part of a prevention and treatment plan for psoriasis. Use the suggestions listed below for children.

If you have an infant who has psoriasis, check with your health care provider regarding dietary guidelines. If your child is still nursing, use the suggestions provided below for yourself.

- **Drink plenty of water.** Hydrated skin is less likely to be itchy and inflamed. Keeping your child well hydrated will help to flush out toxins that lead to inflammation.
- **Identify food allergies.** Many children who have psoriasis also have allergies. Notice if your child's skin reacts positively or negatively to specific foods. Common offenders are foods that contain artificial preservatives, additives, sugars, and dyes. Dairy and gluten containing foods are often irritating. If you suspect that your child has a food allergy, provide him or her with an elimination or rotation diet. I recommend that you document the effects of the diet so that you can clearly identify offenders, yet not deprive your child of food choices needlessly.
- **Provide simple foods for your child.** Use organic products and minimally-processed, grass-fed animal products whenever possible. Provide a variety of whole grains in your child's diet. Most protein should come from vegetable sources, such as dried beans, lentils, and chick peas. If your child likes salmon, serve wild caught fish once or twice each week. Ocean caught salmon contains healthy oils which reduce inflammation.
- **Include plenty of seeds in your child's diet.** Seeds are a "hot" item in recipes right now. This is for good reason. They are packed with healthy oils, protein, and a wide array of nutrients. Make up snack bars that contain seeds and add them to cereal and casseroles. Grind flax seeds prior to using them. Other healthy seeds include pumpkin, sesame, and hemp.

- **Try herbal teas to reduce itch.** If your child has itchy lesions, make up some herbal tea, which is an excellent means of reducing flare-ups.
  When your child scratches the lesions, his or her body releases chemical compounds, which are known as histamines. Histamines make inflammation and itchiness worse, and as you probably know, itchy children are irritable children.
  Gentle soothing herbs can be made into teas which soothe inside and out. You can chill the tea and apply it directly to the lesions as a cold compress or have your child drink the tea. Chamomile, oat straw, and calendula are excellent choices. Burdock root supports detoxification and soothes the skin. Burdock must be used consistently for at least a month for maximum effectiveness.
  If your child does not care for the taste of these herbs, add peppermint, orange peel, or lemon balm for flavor. You can even make the teas into ice pops. If you are breast feeding, enjoy the teas yourself.

Next page: how should I care for my child's skin?

How Should I Care for My Child's Skin?

Bathing

When your child bathes, the water should be comfortably warm but not hot. Use a gentle, hypoallergenic soap and be sure that your child's skin is thoroughly rinsed. You or your child should pat their skin dry and not rub it.

Use gentle shampoos and conditioners. I recommend the use of organic body products. Products which are designed for babies are excellent choices even as your child grows older as they often contain the least toxic chemical compounds.

Topical Remedies and Protection

Discourage your child from itching or picking at lesions, use a natural, chemical free moisturizer on your child's skin and provide protection against sun damage.

I like to add a few drops of apricot kernel, canola, olive, or sesame oil to the tub to create a soothing bath for psoriasis. You can massage the oil into your child's scalp and skin prior to giving him or her a shower. Be careful not to use too much or the tub or shower floor will get slippery, and do not use olive or sesame oil if your child has acne.

Apricot kernel oil is an excellent choice as it is rich in nutrients and non-irritating to sensitive skin. It is expensive and has a short shelf life, so try blending it half and half with canola or olive oil.

If you know how to make herbal oils, make some chickweed, plantain, or calendula oil to use as a moisturizer or topical remedy. You can add a couple of drops of organic lavender essential oil to your child's bath. This is especially helpful at bedtime as lavender is soothing and relaxing.

You can easily make a topical remedy for lesions. Simply combine two tablespoons of borage or evening primrose seed oil with six drops of organic lavender essential oil. Apply the blend to your child's lesions two to four times daily.

The blend reduces itchiness and scaling; fights secondary infections, lubricates, and relieves inflammation and cracking of skin. Be sure to label your healing oil and keep it out of reach of children.

By implementing these strategies, your child's skin will improve. He or she will be healthier, more comfortable, and you will both enjoy life more.