Psoriasis Acceptance

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Accepting Psoriasis

Have you accepted your psoriasis diagnosis yet? Before you answer “yes” reflexively, take a moment. Think about your psoriasis and all that was affected by your diagnosis. Think of what continues to be influenced by your psoriasis today.

Avoid telling yourself, “I was diagnosed years ago. Of course, I have accepted it.” Meanwhile, remember that acknowledging that you have a chronic medical condition like psoriasis is different than accepting it.

Do you have your answer or do you still need a hint? A sure way to tell if you have accepted your psoriasis is to assess your feelings surrounding it. Do you hate your psoriasis? Does it make you uncomfortable when people look at or comment on your skin? Do you dread summer because you cannot cover up as much as you can in the winter? Does a flare make you angry? Do you feel anxious when leaving home because you are unsure of the responses you will receive?

Answering “yes” to any or all of these questions gives the impression that acceptance is not yet a part of your life. Acceptance is an amazing target to shoot for. Acceptance means that you peacefully understand and welcome your current state, no matter how negative or detrimental you think it is. Sometimes people mistake acceptance for liking something. You do not have to like something to accept it.

Risks of Non-acceptance

Like other chronic medical conditions, people with psoriasis are more likely to have comorbid depression and anxiety. It is confirmed that psoriasis does not cause the mental health issues directly.

So, what is the link? The link is stress. When you are faced with a life-changing diagnosis, it forces you to rethink the way you see yourself and the world around you. Perhaps, you previously thought that the world was a wonderful place filled with great people and amazing experiences. Then, psoriasis came in and disrupted your view.

Now, you are not sure how you see things. Children seem scared by your plaque. People have been looking at you differently. The reaction you drew last time you went swimming was enough to make you never want to go again. People have been treating you more negatively.

Without acceptance, the reactions of others begin to change the way you see yourself. If children seem afraid of you, maybe you are scary. If people stare at you, maybe you are odd, and maybe the other swimmers were right to have strong reactions to you jumping in the pool.

It is clear that this change in thinking leads to a change in feelings. You will become more depressed, anxious, self-conscious and fearful. Furthermore, the change in feelings will lead to a change in behavior as you become

more isolated and uncomfortable in social situations.

If you remain unsure about the value of acceptance, consider the alternative. The opposite of acceptance is rejection. Obviously, you would be happy to reject psoriasis, but it is not psoriasis that you are rejecting.

Psoriasis is a part of you, though it doesn't have to define you. It is no different than the nose on your face, your height or the hair on your head. Without acceptance, you are rejecting yourself. If you actively reject yourself, it is only a matter of time before depression and anxiety enter your life or grow in the damage they cause.

Next page: the path to acceptance.

The Path to Acceptance

With acceptance, you can avoid these negative ramifications of psoriasis. Feelings of stress, depression and anxiety will become relics of the past. Acceptance means rising above hate, intolerance and ignorance to be comfortable in your own skin. Acceptance means being happy to be you.

The process of acceptance involves aspects of grief and mourning. Any chronic medical condition diagnosis is a loss. It is the loss of the “old you.” To truly accept the new you, you must say goodbye to the way you formerly perceived yourself. You must let go of feeling of what is fair. Holding on to this outdated version of you only creates tension and inconsistency between what there used to be and what there is currently.

A model for grief and loss works really well in this instance. The model is widely known for addressing death but translates well to the experience of psoriasis. Want to find the acceptance that has eluded you? You will need to move through the five stages. Here’s how:

Denial

Chances are good that if you endure high levels of depression or anxiety triggers by your psoriasis, there is some level of denial that exists. This is natural and normal but unwanted at the same time.

Denial is clinging on to the former version of you, but this version is no longer realistic. To move from denial, begin spending more time in front of a mirror. The process will be uncomfortable at first, but the benefit outweighs the risk. Think about or say aloud what you see. How is your psoriasis today? Have you had recent flares?

Talk with trusted friends and family members more honestly about your symptoms and perceptions of the symptoms. Banish the idea that your psoriasis is a “touchy subject.”

Anger

When denial is addressed, anger is a likely reaction. Again, this feeling is natural, normal and even beneficial. Forget the flawed notion that anger is a bad thing or an unwanted feeling. Anger has a bad reputation because people tend to suppress their feelings for too long leading to an explosive burst of anger later. Avoid this by finding healthy coping skills to funnel the anger out.

Exercise and physical activity are the best because they reduce physical and emotional anger while providing antidepressive and antianxiety properties. If sports are not for you, find ways to release anger through art, journaling or breaking things.

Think about who or what you are angry at. Is it God for letting you down, the doctor for the news or your body for failing you? Finding an outlet for anger is another step towards acceptance.

Depression

Some will move from anger to depression while others will move from depression to anger. The stages are experienced in random order and may even be experienced multiple times. Like with anger, decide what thoughts or situations are fueling the depression.

Do you think that you are flawed or broken because you have psoriasis? Do you think that no one will ever love you or your loved ones will stop? Once you identify as many depression-fueled thoughts as possible, you can review them to look for errors in thinking.

These are called cognitive distortions. Depression uses them to make you feel more depressed by making you believe illogical things. Debate and challenge these errors to arrive at conclusions that make sense and will add to happiness.

Next page: three more steps on the path to acceptance.

The Path to Acceptance

Anxiety

If your psoriasis stress has been around for a while, it could manifest into anxiety. Like with depression, reflect on the aspects of your psoriasis that make you feel anxious. Write them down to see them in black and white. There is something more impactful about seeing your thoughts written down as it allows you to be more objective when reviewing them.

Look at your anxious behaviors. Have you been staying home more? Have you been only going out at night to avoid people? Have you been cutting off communication with your trusted supports? Look at what is contributing to this decision making. If the answer is anxiety, rethink your actions. Anxiety wants to cut out the healthy supports in your life so you are left isolated and vulnerable.

Bargaining

In situations like this, people create various situations and scenarios to end their psoriasis diagnosis. Unfortunately, these bargains or trades are not grounded in reality. Some will bargain with God by saying, “God, if you take away this psoriasis, I will be the best member of my church, donate to the poor, work at a soup kitchen and read books to the blind.”

Others try to bargain with science by saying, “I will cure my psoriasis by eating only organic, local, gluten-free, casing-free food without any red dye in it.”

The truth is that both bargains are beneficial for you, but neither will cure your psoriasis. Additionally, they lead to a crash as you complete the behaviors without the desired result, which leaves you open to experience the anger towards Gods or science.

Avoid cycling through this process by noting that you only have limited control over your symptoms. Letting go of control brings you closer to acceptance.

Acceptance

You must accept the things you cannot change. Your control over your psoriasis is only partial. Working to remind yourself of this through repetition will be helpful. Rather than fighting against the current, allow yourself to be swept away with the idea that psoriasis is a part of you that will not change.

If you always wanted to be taller, getting depressed, angry and anxious will not increase your height. Just as bargaining or denying that your eyes are brown will not make them hazel. You are who you are and how you are. There is beauty, understanding and peace in that truth.

Conclusion

If you have psoriasis, you know what does not work. You know that denial, anger, depression, anxiety and bargaining only end in unwanted thoughts and behaviors. Choose a different road to end the cycle. Choose the path of acceptance and use denial, depression, anger and the rest to push you forward by illustrating how stuck you really are.

Acceptance does not come easy but having it will instill you with unequaled pride and love.