Benefits of Exercise

by ANGELA FINLAY

Tips for Comfortable Exercise With Psoriasis

It’s no secret that exercise is enormously healthy, but it can be easier to focus on the uncomfortable aspects of working out, especially when you live with a chronic disease.

However, there are a number of reasons to consider ramping up your exercise routine if you struggle with psoriasis, and clearer skin is just the beginning. Whatever your current activity level, take some helpful tips to keep you on track and get more from your workouts, without irritating your psoriasis symptoms.

The Benefits of Exercise

It may seem like a long shot, but upping your activity level could be your best bet for better skin. Psoriasis tends to spread around the body, but exercise is an equally far-reaching solution: it will help alleviate your superficial skin symptoms, but also treat the root of your psoriasis troubles.

Weight Control

Psoriasis patients are an average of 7% heavier than those without the condition, and that could have something to do with inflammation. Psoriasis stems from an inflammatory immune system response, and obesity can lead to chronic inflammation. On the other hand, inflammation can also lead the body to make more fat cells, too. The result? A cycle of inflammation and weight gain that exacerbates psoriasis symptoms.

Although weight problems and psoriasis seem to go hand in hand, doctors stress that exercise can stop the cycle rather quickly. By losing weight, you can reduce inflammation, improve your circulation, and nourish skin cells more efficiently.

Lower Risk of Heart Disease

Psoriasis patients are at a higher risk for metabolic syndrome, which can lead to diabetes, coronary heart disease, and stroke. Age doesn’t seem to make a difference: even children with psoriasis have a greater rate of metabolic syndrome than their clear-skinned peers. The best way to bring blood pressure and cholesterol back down to normal levels is through a healthy diet and regular exercise, so it becomes extremely important for psoriasis patients to get active in order to counteract the heightened heart risks.

Treatment Boost

As you lose weight and get fit, you may find that your psoriasis treatment begins to work better. Recent studies show that overweight patients with plaque psoriasis who lose a moderate amount of weight get more noticeable results from topical skin treatments.

Since stress is a big trigger for psoriasis flares, eliminating stressors can help you naturally defeat your symptoms, and perhaps decrease your need for medication in the long term. Exercise releases calming chemicals to defeat stress hormones, plus it elevates your mood and helps you sleep better – exactly the changes you need to reduce the physical effects of stress.

Next page: ways psoriasis can interfere with exercise.

How Psoriasis can interfere with Exercise

Starting (and maintaining) an exercise routine can be difficult for anybody, but it can be especially challenging when you live with itchy, irritated, and sensitive skin. From aesthetic issues to more deep-seated discomfort, exercise can aggravate your psoriasis in a number of ways:

The Koebner Phenomenon

Small scrapes and scratches are normal when you exercise frequently (especially if you enjoy sports), but these little skin irritations can lead to big problems when you suffer from psoriasis.

Cuts, scrapes, and bruises can cause a response known as the Koebner phenomenon, where new psoriasis plaques form at the site of the injury. These new eruptions affect up to half of all psoriasis sufferers, and the most susceptible patients will develop a new lesion every time their skin is injured.

Friction Issues

Psoriasis plaques are easily irritated by rubbing, and friction can also trigger a psoriasis flare. During high intensity exercise or repetitive movements, the areas of your body where skin touches skin will tend to rub against each other painfully – under the breasts, abdominal folds, inner thighs and the groin.

When your skin is already sensitive or irritated, this can lead to inflammation, or even breaking and bleeding.

Psoriatic Arthritis Flares

Psoriasis discomfort is often skin deep, but not always. If you're one of the unlucky 25% who also suffer from psoriatic arthritis, you might find that too much exercise worsens your joint pain and inflammation. However, exercise has been shown to increase mobility and decrease swelling in the long term, so it's important to find a way to balance some regular activity with your psoriatic arthritis symptoms.

Embarrassment

If you're hesitant to parade around in short sleeves and gym shorts, you're certainly not alone. For many people, psoriasis strikes the arms and legs most often, and unsightly red spots or raised, flaky patches can keep you inside and inactive.

Studies suggest that a less than ideal body image can sometimes motivate people to exercise, but those who feel embarrassed and unhappy with their body are less likely to exercise in public. In turn, it can be difficult to stick with a fitness routine when your psoriasis is flaring up.

Next page: overcoming exercise discomforts.

Overcoming Exercise Discomforts

A good exercise routine for psoriasis should include both aerobic and strengthening activity, which will help you shed weight and build muscle faster than either approach alone. But the amount you do will depend on your

current fitness level, your health goals, and the extent of your symptoms.

For instance, building muscle around your joints it’s a sure-fire way to ease the strain of psoriatic arthritis, but you could injure yourself and exacerbate other symptoms if you overdo it. Begin slowly, and you can rea more rewards by:

Choosing Activities You Like

Trainers, athletes, and physical therapists will all say that you’re much more likely to meet your goals if you’re enjoying the ride. That means you shouldn’t make yourself do an activity just because it’s good exercise: if you don’t like running, don’t run, and don’t feel guilty about it.

Instead, choose something you don’t mind doing (you’ll probably learn to like it a lot more with practice), and find a way to incorporate it into your routine.

Avoiding Trauma to Your Skin

Even if you’re not prone to the Koebner phenomenon, you should take extra care to protect exposed skin, and the areas that tend to rub. Wear loose-fitting clothes that let your skin breathe (try technical fabrics that are made to keep you cool and wick away sweat), and stop if you notice irritation or reddening areas.

You can protect against chafing by applying talcum powder to sweaty areas, and use a lubricant (that doesn’t irritate your skin) on areas that rub together (thighs, upper arms, and the groin are some common danger zones).

If you do notice a skin problem, time is of the essence. Always keep topical medication close at hand so you can treat the area right away, and hopefully prevent a flare-up.

Pain and inflammation can make it more difficult to get through a workout, and it’s your body’s way of telling you to slow down. Rest any areas that need it, and talk to your doctor about adapting your exercise routine to suit your symptoms.