



# PSORIASIS - MORE THAN JUST A SKIN CONDITION

PSORIASIS IS A CHRONIC SKIN CONDITION THAT APPEARS AS SCALY RED RASHES ALL OVER THE BODY. WHILE IT commonly affects the scalp, elbows, knees, buttocks and trunk, the face is fortunately less commonly involved. The severity of psoriasis often varies from individual to individual, but for most cases common symptoms include: persistent itching of the skin, pain and constant shedding of the topmost layer of skin.

This condition is caused by an overactive immune system. We like to say that the cause of psoriasis is 50 per cent genetic and 50 per cent environmental. This is because one has to first have the susceptible gene for psoriasis. Then an environmental trigger is required to "turn on" the switch of that gene. These triggers are wide and varied, and can be anything from drugs to bacterial infections (e.g. strep throat), stress, major illnesses and so on.

While the condition does not restrict a patient's range of movement or prevent them from performing any activities, many patients with psoriasis tend to be extremely self-conscious due to the disfiguring nature of the rash. This often leads to a low self-esteem, causing them to become socially isolated. Some may even lapse into depression.

Severe psoriasis is also associated with the development of arthritis (painful swollen joints) as well as a higher risk of developing diabetes, cholesterol problems, high blood pressure and heart attacks. This puts psoriasis in a different league as, unlike other skin conditions like eczema, there is a very real medical risk to the patient's health if he/she has this condition.

Thankfully, however, it is also because of these implications that medical research into psoriasis is at the cutting edge of skin disease research. While a "magic bullet" that can completely cure or eliminate psoriasis still eludes us, a slew of new drugs known as biologics have been developed that appear to be very effective in controlling psoriasis.

These new biologics are as close to a cure for psoriasis as one can get, so long as one maintains on this treatment and keeps a healthy lifestyle. Patients with psoriasis may benefit from applying topical agents like mineral oils, moisturizers and combination (corticosteroid-vitamin D) prescriptive creams to help soothe affected regions of the skin and reduce the dryness that accompanies the buildup of excess skin at these regions. Before applying any ointment or cream, always check with your doctor if it is suitable for your condition as improper use of some of these agents may actually aggravate the condition, as is the case with the indiscriminate use of systemic steroids. ■

