Psoriasis: What It Is and How to Manage It

Psoriasis is a common, long-term skin condition caused by an overactive immune system. It causes skin cells to grow too quickly, leading to thick, dry, scaly patches called plaques. These patches commonly appear on the elbows, knees, scalp, and lower back, but psoriasis can develop anywhere on the body. Depending on skin tone, psoriasis may look red, pink, brown, purple, or darker than the surrounding skin. Psoriasis is not contagious and cannot be spread from person to person.

What Does Psoriasis Look and Feel Like?

Psoriasis can look different from person to person. The most common type, called plaque psoriasis, causes raised areas of skin covered with scales. These areas may itch, feel dry or irritated, or become painful when the skin cracks. Psoriasis can also affect areas that are not always easy to see. It may develop on the scalp, behind the ears, in skin folds, or on the hands and feet. Psoriasis often follows a pattern of flares and periods when the skin improves. Certain factors can trigger or worsen a flare, including stress, skin injuries, infections, smoking, alcohol, and some medications. Not everyone has the same triggers, so paying attention to when symptoms become worse can be helpful.

Psoriasis and Your Overall Health

Psoriasis is more than a condition that affects the skin because it involves the immune system, some people with psoriasis develop inflammation in other parts of the body. One important condition associated with psoriasis is psoriatic arthritis. This can cause joint pain, swelling, stiffness, or difficulty moving a joint. Symptoms may develop before or after skin symptoms appear. If you have psoriasis and notice persistent joint pain, swelling, or morning stiffness, talk with your dermatologist or another healthcare professional. Early evaluation and treatment of psoriatic arthritis can help protect your joints.

Psoriasis can also affect quality of life. Itching, visible skin changes, discomfort, and concerns about how others may react can sometimes make people feel self-conscious or frustrated. If psoriasis is affecting your sleep, work, activities, or emotional well-being, let your dermatologist know. These are important parts of your overall health and can help guide treatment.

Treatment Options

Although there is currently no cure for psoriasis, treatment can control symptoms, reduce inflammation, and help clear the skin. The right treatment depends on the type and severity of psoriasis, the areas of the body involved, other health conditions, and your individual preferences. Treatment may include prescription creams or ointments to reduce inflammation,

redness, scaling, and itching, light therapy, or oral medications that work throughout the body in different ways to reduce the immune activity that drives psoriasis. Some treatments work by slowing the rapid growth of skin cells, while others target specific parts of the immune system involved in psoriasis.

At Calvert Dermatology, we work with each patient to develop a treatment plan based on their individual needs. For some people, topical treatment may be enough to control their symptoms. Others may benefit from phototherapy or oral medications. Your dermatologist can discuss the available options and help determine which approach is appropriate for you.

When to See a Dermatologist

If you have persistent itchy, scaly, or thickened patches of skin, it is a good idea to have them evaluated. Several other skin conditions can look similar to psoriasis, so an accurate diagnosis is important before starting treatment. You should also see a dermatologist if your psoriasis is spreading, becoming more uncomfortable, interfering with your daily activities, or no longer responding to your current treatment. If you develop joint pain, swelling, or stiffness, be sure to mention those symptoms as well.

Psoriasis can be a frustrating condition, but you do not have to simply live with uncomfortable or bothersome skin. With the right treatment plan and ongoing care, many people can significantly improve their symptoms and keep their psoriasis under control.

Bottom Line

Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that can cause dry, scaly, itchy, and sometimes painful patches. It can affect more than just the skin, so symptoms such as joint pain or swelling should not be ignored. While there is no cure, there are many effective treatment options available. A dermatologist can help determine what type of psoriasis you have and develop a treatment plan that fits your needs.

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