COLUMBUS COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Special Feature
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Date: June 24, 2025

What to know about psoriasis

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – If you watch television, you've likely seen ads for medications that treat psoriasis. That's because about 3% of the world's population suffers from this skin disease, which can be treated but not cured.

Psoriasis is a chronic autoimmune condition in which the immune system attacks itself, causing inflammation. It's most commonly found in Caucasians, but people of any ethnicity can experience psoriasis. And if you have a family member with the condition, you're more likely to have it yourself.

People who have psoriasis suffer from itchy, scaly patches, which are most commonly found on the knees, elbows, palms, soles of the feet, trunk (buttocks, lower back and belly button) and scalp. These patches can be painful when they flare up, often making it difficult to sleep. If you scratch off even a small amount of the scales, they can bleed, which makes the problem worse.

If you think you might have psoriasis, your fingernails and toenails might be able to tell you. People with this skin disease often suffer from pits in their nails, detachment of the nail from the nail bed, and a yellow color to the general area of the fingernails and toenails.

About 30% of people who have psoriasis develop psoriatic arthritis — a type of inflammatory arthritis that causes a large amount of joint pain. This may make your joints feel stiff, achy and swollen in the morning, which requires you to stretch them out in order to go about your day. Psoriatic arthritis is different from osteoarthritis in that it can worsen if left untreated, and lead to debilitating joint disease.

Treating psoriasis
While there is no cure for psoriasis, you can treat it with the following:

- **Topical creams or ointments** – The most prescribed topical product for psoriasis is cortisosteroids, which help decrease inflammation and redness in the skin. There are also several non-steroid medications that have been recently approved that do not come with the side effects of long-term steroids, such as thinning and discoloration of the skin. It's important to note that while these medications can provide some relief for the main symptoms of psoriasis, they are not a good long-term option for psoriatic arthritis.
- **Phototherapy** – This is the use of specific wavelengths of ultraviolent (UV) light to decrease skin inflammation. When you undergo this treatment, you typically need to stand in a phototherapy machine for just a couple of minutes, two to three times a week. Phototherapy is a good option in that it does not carry the risks of other kinds of treatments.

- **Systemic therapies** – This kind of treatment helps suppress the immune system, which can lessen the symptoms of psoriasis. It is typically reserved for moderate to severe psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis and cases in which topical therapy doesn't work. Many systemic medications are expensive and require prior authorization from the insurance company prior to usage, and they can cause widely varying side effects.

If you have questions about psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis, make an appointment with Columbus Dermatology Clinic by visiting columbusdermatology.org or calling 402-562-4870.

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