



# Psoriasis

## *Causes and treatments*

Psoriasis can affect the skin and the joints. This handout describes these 2 types of psoriasis and how they are treated.

### What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a *chronic* (ongoing) condition that causes skin inflammation. It can also affect the joints. It affects about 2% of the population (2 out of 100 people).

When it affects the skin, dead skin cells, or *scale*, build up on top of red patches. It can affect any part of the body, but most often it occurs on the elbows, knees, and scalp. Psoriasis is sometimes linked to other common, serious health conditions. Some of these are obesity, hypertension (high blood pressure), depression, and heart disease.

### How does psoriasis develop?

Scientists are still trying to discover what causes psoriasis to develop. It tends to run in families. It is **not** contagious. Some medicines can cause it or make it worse, but we do not know why. Infections with *Streptococcus* (“Strep”) bacteria, such as strep throat, can cause flare-ups of a certain type of psoriasis.

### How is psoriasis treated?

Psoriasis can be treated with topical medicines (creams that go on the skin), as well as oral medicines (pills) and medicines that are injected. But, there is no cure. The most commonly used topical medicines are strong corticosteroid and vitamin D-like creams.

Methotrexate and acitretin are two oral medicines that are used. Etanercept, adalimumab, and ustekinumab are 3 medicines that are given by shot or infusion. Many of these medicines can have serious side effects that your health care provider will talk with you about. Be sure to tell your health care provider if you are, or think you may be pregnant.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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## Psoriatic Arthritis

*Psoriatic arthritis* is psoriasis that affects the joints. It occurs in up to 30% of people (30 out of 100) who have psoriasis on their skin. Symptoms include joint pain, swelling, and stiffness that last more than a few minutes when you get up in the morning. Some kinds of psoriatic arthritis can cause permanent joint damage. It may require treatment with medicines to keep joints from getting worse.

## Website to Learn More

- National Psoriasis Foundation: [www.psoriasis.org](http://www.psoriasis.org)

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