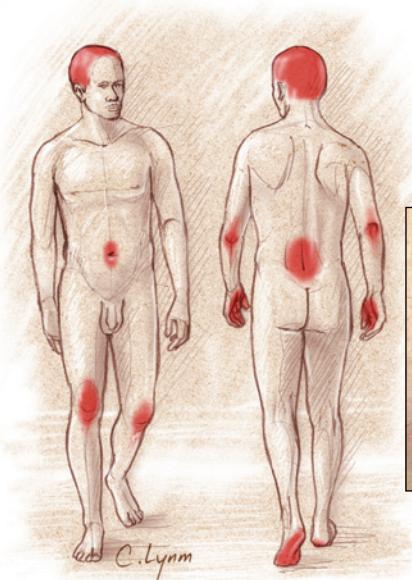


Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a skin disease that affects more than 4 million persons in the United States. Besides causing skin problems, psoriasis can lead to problems with joints, fingernails and toenails, genitals, and inside of the mouth. The most common form of psoriasis leaves patches of scaly, red skin, usually on the elbows, knees, scalp, lower back, or face, but any place on the body may be affected. These scaly patches are called **plaques**. The amount of affected skin varies considerably among different individuals. Some persons develop pain, stiffness, and swelling in their joints (for example, the knees, wrists, or elbows) associated with psoriasis called **psoriatic arthritis**.

Scientists have found that psoriasis is a genetic or inherited disease that affects the body's **immune** (disease-fighting) system. Infections, stress, and some medications may worsen the psoriasis disease process. Psoriasis is not contagious. The December 17, 2003, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about treatment of psoriasis in persons with extensive skin disease.

Common Locations of Psoriasis



Psoriasis Skin Lesions



DETERMINING IF YOU HAVE PSORIASIS

Sometimes psoriasis can be difficult to diagnose because many diseases have signs or symptoms involving the skin. A careful history of skin abnormalities, including their appearance and the length of time the skin problem has existed, is very important in helping your doctor determine if you have psoriasis. Small samples (**biopsies**) of skin may be removed and examined with a microscope or other special testing equipment. Psoriasis is a skin disease that may improve or worsen, but it usually does not go away entirely. However, treating psoriasis can improve the state of the skin and make quality of life better. **Dermatologists** are doctors with specialized training in treating diseases of the skin and nails, including psoriasis.

PSORIASIS TREATMENT OPTIONS

- **Topical** (on surface of the skin) medications, including **corticosteroids** (medications that reduce inflammation)
- **Phototherapy** (treatment with light), including sunlight or ultraviolet light
- **Systemic** medications (oral or injected medications that act on the whole body)

Individuals with psoriasis should take care not to injure their skin or nails. Although light therapy is often an important part of psoriasis treatment, sunburn should be avoided because it can make psoriasis worse. Your doctor needs to individualize your treatments for psoriasis because the disease may affect you in ways different from others.

Sources: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, American Academy of Dermatology, National Psoriasis Foundation
Photo Courtesy of Kenneth Gordon, MD, Loyola University Medical Center

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- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases
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