

# Psoriasis

**P**soriasis is a common skin disease that affects more than 7 million people in the United States.

Patients usually have red, scaly, small to large raised areas of skin (called **plaques**). These commonly affect the scalp, trunk, elbows, knees, and genital areas but can affect any part of the body, including the nails. About a quarter of patients develop pain, stiffness, and swelling in their joints (**psoriatic arthritis**). Patients with severe psoriasis may have an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, and cardiovascular disease. Psoriasis also increases risk of depression.

Psoriasis is a genetic-based (inherited) disease that affects the body's immune system. Infections, stress, alcohol, and some medications may worsen the disease. Psoriasis is not contagious. The August 24/31, 2011, issue of JAMA includes an article about medications used to treat psoriasis. This Patient Page is based on one published in the December 17, 2003, issue of JAMA.

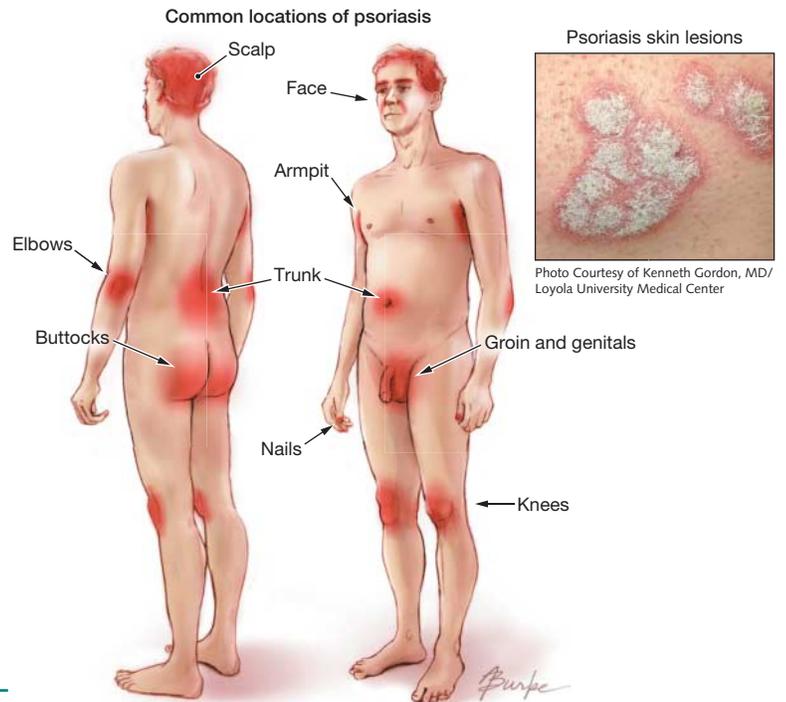
## DETERMINING IF YOU HAVE PSORIASIS

Psoriasis is usually relatively straightforward to diagnose because of the very typical appearance of the red, scaly plaques. Occasionally, a small sample (**biopsy**) of skin may be needed to help diagnose the condition. Psoriasis is a disease that can improve and worsen over time, but it usually does not go away completely. Treating psoriasis can improve the skin and may improve quality of life. **Dermatologists** are doctors with specialized training in treating diseases of the skin and nails, including psoriasis.

## PSORIASIS TREATMENT OPTIONS

- **Topical** treatments (on the surface of the skin), including corticosteroid creams (to reduce inflammation) or vitamin D preparations
- **Phototherapy** (treatment with light) in specially equipped ultraviolet light machines
- **Systemic** medications, including oral (by mouth) 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 and increases the risk of skin cancer. Your doctor needs to individualize your treatments for psoriasis because the disease may affect you in many ways.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Dermatology  
[www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)
- National Psoriasis Foundation  
[www.psoriasis.org](http://www.psoriasis.org)
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases  
[www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)

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Sources: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, American Academy of Dermatology, National Psoriasis Foundation

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