

Psoriasis

Psoriasis is more than just a skin condition. Psoriasis is a chronic, recurrent skin disorder that affects 2–5% of the world's population. Psoriasis can manifest in many forms and it can appear at any age. Approximately 1 million Canadians and 80 million people worldwide have psoriasis.

The most common form, **plaque psoriasis**, begins with little red bumps that gradually grow larger to form scales. The scales on the surface of the skin flake off easily and often, whereas scales below the surface stick together and commonly form lesions that are tender and likely to bleed. The duration of active psoriasis flares can range from weeks to months to years depending on severity and treatment plan.

Psoriasis can affect the elbows, knees, groin and genitals, arms, legs, palms and soles, scalp and face, body folds and nails. It will often appear in the same place on both sides of the body.

What causes psoriasis?

The cause of psoriasis is not known; however, recent discoveries point to an abnormality in the functioning of certain white blood cells that trigger inflammation in the skin. Because of the inflammation, the skin grows and sheds too rapidly, every three to four days.

Psoriasis causes as much disability as cancer, diabetes and other major medical diseases. Up to 30% of patients with psoriasis may have symptoms of arthritis and 5–10% may have some functional disability from arthritis of various joints. Sadly, many psoriasis patients experience low self-esteem, depression, stress, anxiety and feelings of helplessness.

Dermatologists can help

Effective treatments are available to control psoriasis and to improve patient quality of life. Untreated or unsatisfied psoriasis patients are encouraged to seek medical attention with a dermatologist.

For more information

CDA-reviewed patient information is available at www.medbroadcast.com and www.psoriasisinfo.ca. Accurate medical information can also be found on the American Academy of Dermatology web site www.skincarephysicians.com/psoriasisnet and on the US National Psoriasis Foundation website www.psoriasis.org.