



29 • October  
World Psoriasis Day

## Psoriasis Myths and Misconceptions

Unlike other ailments, psoriasis can be seen on the skin and often people guess at what is wrong. They wonder if the lesions might be contagious, which they are not, or that the person who has psoriasis is unclean, overly nervous or high-strung, which they may be, but that is not the reason they have psoriasis. Sometimes they may believe the person who has the skin disorder did something to cause psoriasis to appear; but that, too, is also false.

Psoriasis is a disorder stemming from a physical defect just like other disorders, such as arthritis, asthma, diabetes or nearsightedness. It is very important to educate the public about psoriasis and not allow myths to spread.

### Common myths about psoriasis:

#### **Myth: “Psoriasis is contagious.”**

**Fact:** Psoriasis, especially in moderate or severe forms, is highly visible. Because of the abnormal growth of skin cells, thick red scaly inflamed patches of skin appear. However, psoriasis is not contagious. You can't 'catch' the disease from another person and you can't pass it on to someone else by touching them or having close contact. Actually, psoriasis is as contagious as freckles!

#### **Myth: “Psoriasis is just a skin disease. A cosmetic problem.”**

**Fact:** Psoriasis is chronic disease of the immune system that causes the abnormal growth of skin cells. While a normal skin cell matures in 28 to 30 days and is shed from the skin's surface unnoticed, a psoriatic skin cell takes only 3 to 4 days to mature and move to the surface, resulting in cells piling up and forming the scaly lesions. Psoriasis lesions can be painful and itchy, and they can crack and bleed. About 30 – 50% of all people with psoriasis also develop psoriasis arthritis which causes pain, stiffness and swelling in and around the joints. Skin inflammation in psoriasis is just the tip of the iceberg – there is increasing evidence suggesting links with serious health concerns such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, liver disease, depression and obesity.

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**Myth: “Psoriasis only affects patients physically.”**

**Fact:** Aside from the physical burden of the disease, there is also a significant psychological and emotional impact experienced by psoriasis sufferers. People with psoriasis often report feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anger, frustration and even depression related to the appearance of their skin and how others react to their condition. Some patients with severe psoriasis have even experienced thoughts of suicide. Many individuals react to their condition by wearing concealing clothing, curtailing everyday activities such as swimming or going to the gym if it means they will attract stares or negative comments. Psoriasis sufferers often compare the dysfunction and disability of the condition to that experienced by people with other chronic conditions such as diabetes or heart disease.

**Myth: “Psoriasis is caused by poor hygiene.”**

**Fact:** Psoriasis is a disease of the immune system and has nothing to do with poor hygiene. Triggers that can influence the course of psoriasis include infections, stress or worry, hormonal changes, injury to the skin, alcohol, obesity, poor diet, and certain medications.

**Myth: “Psoriasis can be cured”**

**Fact:** Psoriasis is a chronic, life-long disease. There is no known cure yet, but with new options and improved existing treatments, people have a wide variety of ways to help manage the symptoms of psoriasis. Until a cure for psoriasis is found, pharmaceutical research continues to hold the best hope for increasingly more effective therapies leading to better overall management of psoriasis. Research into the immune system has led to the development of new biological drugs that target the underlying causes of the condition.

**Myth: “Psoriasis is easily diagnosed.”**

**Fact:** Many conditions affecting the skin look alike, for example some early symptoms of psoriasis, such as itching and redness, look the same as eczema or atopic dermatitis. This can sometimes make the disease difficult to diagnose. It’s important to see a doctor who can do the necessary tests to make a proper diagnosis.



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**Myth: “Psoriasis cannot be inherited.”**

**Fact:** While many patients with no family history develop psoriasis, there is a genetic link in approximately 40 – 60% of patients with the condition. Numerous studies point to a genetic predisposition, or inherited tendency, for these patients to develop psoriasis. Having the genetic predisposition, however, doesn't necessarily mean that an individual will develop the disease. Other contributing factors, such as injury or infection, may act in conjunction with several genes, or specific patterns of genes, to set in motion the chain of events resulting in psoriasis.

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