

# Psoriasis – Why It Happens and How to Care for It?

Psoriasis is a non-contagious chronic inflammatory disorder of the skin caused by genetic and environmental factors. The skin lesions are characterised by red, sharply demarcated, thick scaly plaques, and can affect any parts of the body, including the scalp.

## Topical Application

- Apply sparingly, never treat more frequently than prescribed. A fingertip unit is the right amount for an area of skin the size of the front and back of one hand.
- Apply along the direction of hair growth.
- Best applied immediately after bath.
- Avoid contamination of medication.

## Emollients

- Helps to moisturise and prevent dryness to the skin. Emollients are key in the maintenance and treatment of psoriasis.
- Most effective when applied right after your bath or shower.

## Bath solutions

- Soaking in a bath with tar preparation is beneficial in making the psoriasis patches soft and relieves itch. The soft scales can be gently rubbed off with a soft towel.

## Scalp care

- When psoriatic scales are thick, massage mineral oils e.g. olive oil or coal tar preparations onto the scalp and wrap your scalp with a shower cap/warm moist towel for 30 minutes before rinsing with your regular shampoo. Do not peel off the scales forcefully. Gently comb off the scales, and repeat daily until the scales are softer before starting some medications.
- When applying lotions/gels/ointments, part your hair to reveal the affected scalp area. Apply directly to scalp areas that have visible psoriasis with your fingertip. Gels or ointments can be left on the scalp overnight or for about 2 hours in the evening and washed off before bedtime. It is important to leave the treatment areas uncovered, so do not cover your scalp with a towel. When rinsing, use your regular ordinary shampoo on dry hair, rubbing your scalp gently before wetting, lathering and rinsing.
- Medicated shampoos should be massaged well into the scalp then wrapped with a warm damp towel around the scalp for 10 to 15 minutes before rinsing off. You may follow a second round of rinsing with your regular ordinary shampoo or conditioner.

## Foot Care

- Wear 100% cotton socks and change daily.
- Wear shoes that are open and airy.
- Dry well between the toes after showering.
- Inspect the feet daily for area of pressure or ulceration.

## Hand and Nail Care

- Wash your hands with soap. It is helpful to wash them a second time with an emollient soap substitute to moisturise the skin and prevent it from drying and cracking.
- Avoid alcohol-based sanitisers that are drying and will lead to irritant hand dermatitis.
- Wear cotton gloves at home and at night to help the moisturiser penetrate the skin and work more effectively.
- Use plastic or rubber gloves with cotton linings when washing the dishes or hand washing clothes to prevent unnecessary drying of the skin.
- Soak finger/toe nails in warm water before trimming them straight across.
- Wear proper fitting shoes to avoid pressure points for affected toe nails.
- Do not use your nail as a tool, and avoid nail damage by excessive filing, picking or digging around the nail.

## Develop A Healthy Lifestyle

The immune system is a central factor in psoriasis so strengthen your immunity with a healthy lifestyle:

- Stop smoking
- Minimise your alcohol intake
- Sleep adequately
- Exercise regularly
- Have a balanced diet rich in fresh vegetables and fruits
- Manage stress effectively
- Maintain good control of pre-existing illnesses e.g. diabetes or hypertension



Psoriasis affecting the legs.

## References:

Understanding Psoriasis Treatments from Psoriasis Association of Singapore Booklet  
[www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org) — website of American Academy of dermatology  
[www.psoriasis.org](http://www.psoriasis.org) — website of National Psoriasis Foundation USA