

Psoriasis

Psoriasis (sore-EYE-uh-sis) is a common skin problem that looks like pink or red areas of skin topped with white or silvery scaly patches. Many people first develop psoriasis in childhood. It can be on any body area, but is often found on the scalp, arms, legs and buttocks. Some children can get patches of psoriasis all over their bodies.

Psoriasis can be itchy. The scales fall off if they are brushed or scratched. Sometimes sores develop that can bleed. Psoriasis is a problem that can last for many years. It can seem to go away for a time and then come back again and again. Psoriasis is not contagious (catching). Your child did not get psoriasis from anyone and he or she cannot give it to others.

Causes of Psoriasis

The cause of psoriasis is not entirely known. Many doctors think psoriasis happens when a person's immune system becomes too active, causing thick, scaly areas on the skin. Some patients have another family member with psoriasis. Others do not know anyone in the family with this skin problem. Psoriasis often appears near a cut, scrape or burn where the skin has been injured, after an infection such as strep throat or during stressful times.

Treatment

Treatment is based on where and how serious your child's psoriasis is. Creams and ointments that are applied to the skin, such as cortisone, vitamin D and retinoids can help control the psoriasis. Special shampoos and lotions can be applied to the scalp. Controlling your child's psoriasis may take trials of different treatments and requires regular follow-up appointments.

If the psoriasis is severe and covers a lot of your child's skin, his doctor may prescribe carefully controlled ultraviolet light treatments. Medicines taken by mouth may also be used to control psoriasis. Your child should be seen by a dermatologist (skin doctor) if the psoriasis is hard to control.

Prevention

To keep psoriasis from getting worse, your child can take these steps:

- Wear protective guards (kneepads, helmets, etc.) when playing sports.
- Avoid picking patches of psoriasis.
- **Always use sunscreen.** A little sunlight can often help, but sunburns can cause new sores.

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Prevention, continued

Treating infections and illness early can stop bad flares of psoriasis. If your child gets a sore throat or other signs of an illness that has triggered psoriasis before, call his regular doctor.

Follow Up

A child who is being treated for psoriasis should be checked regularly by a dermatologist.

For more information about psoriasis, contact the National Psoriasis Foundation at 1-800-723-9166, or visit their website at www.psoriasis.org.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.