

Adventist Healthcare: Health Tip of the Week

Psoriasis

It is estimated that over seven million Americans have psoriasis. More than 150,000 new cases are reported each year. According to the National Psoriasis Foundation, 20,000 children under 10 years of age are diagnosed with psoriasis annually.

What is psoriasis?

- * It is an immune-mediated, genetic disease manifesting in the skin and/or the joints.
- * Psoriasis is a non-contagious, life-long skin disease. There is no cure.
- * In healthy skin, cells mature and are shed in about 28 days. In people with psoriasis, this process is accelerated to only three or four days.
- * Excessive reproduction causes skin cells to build up and form abnormal scaling.
- * If less than two percent of the body is involved, the case is considered mild. Between three and ten percent is considered moderate. More than ten percent is severe.

What are the causes of psoriasis?

- * Researchers suspect that whether a person develops psoriasis or not may depend on a trigger.
- * Possible triggers include: emotional stress, skin injury (scratches, surgery), systemic infections (strep), certain medications (lithium, beta blockers) and weather.
- * Studies have also indicated that a person is born genetically predisposed to psoriasis. One-third of cases have a family history.

What are some of the treatments for psoriasis?

- * Apply moisturizing cream while your skin is damp.
- * Don't scratch affected skin. It worsens psoriasis and can cause new lesions to form.
- * Natural sunlight can have a positive effect on psoriatic plaque.
- * Topical treatments such as ointments, gels or lotions that contain coal tar.
- * Changes in diet can help avoid flare-ups.
- * Exercise to reduce stress.
- * Psychological counseling is beneficial to those with moderate to severe psoriasis.

(Researchers are continuing to study the genetic aspects of psoriasis. They are developing new treatments that quiet immune system reactions in the skin.)

Sources: National Psoriasis Foundation, American Academy of Dermatology, National Institute of Arthritis, Musculoskeletal & Skin Diseases and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.