

December News

All About Psoriasis

What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a dermatological disorder affecting the skin. Sufferers develop patches of red, scaly skin over different parts of the body. It is most commonly found on the scalp, elbows, knees and lower back. Joints can also be affected in a condition called **psoriatic arthritis** which affects about 5% of those with psoriasis. Chronic joint pain is usually the consequence of this condition.

What are the symptoms of psoriasis?

- Dry, scaly, itchy skin
- Raised patches that when rubbed show bleeding pin points
- Itching or painful skin
- Pitted, cracked, crumbly or loose nails

What causes psoriasis?

The exact cause of psoriasis is unknown. However, it is known that psoriasis is a defect in the body's ability to regulate skin growth. In the areas where signs of psoriasis are visible, the skin grows at an accelerated rate. In addition to growing, in these areas, the skin cells are not shed but instead are retained on the skin creating raised lesions. This describes a problem in skin production and not an infection, therefore is not contagious. Psoriasis does however, have a genetic component. If one of your parents has psoriasis, you are more likely to develop the condition.

How common is psoriasis?

In Canada, 2-3% of the population

has psoriasis which means roughly ONE million people are living with this disease.

When do people develop psoriasis?

Psoriasis can begin at any age—the average age for diagnosis is 28.

Can Psoriasis be cured?

Despite the fact that there is no cure for psoriasis, many therapies can put symptoms of psoriasis into remission for months to years. Triggers, can cause psoriasis to return and require additional treatment.

What can trigger psoriasis to appear?

- Infections (common cold etc.)
- Skin injury or trauma
- Alcohol
- Certain medications
- Diet. Individual foods that trigger psoriasis vary from person to person.
- Climate. A little bit of sun can help improve symptoms, however overexposure to the sun in a hot humid environment can make things worse. Additionally, dry winter climates can worsen psoriasis.
- Changes in hormones (puberty, menopause etc.) Surprisingly, pregnancy can cause symptoms of psoriasis to decrease or disappear!
- Stress, while not a trigger can cause a worsening of already existing lesions.

How is psoriasis treated?

There are many different types of

treatments for psoriasis depending on the severity and spread of disease. The treatments must be determined on an individual basis by the physician in collaboration with the patient.

Some common therapies for mild to moderate psoriasis include:

- Topical Coal Tar—one of the oldest therapies for psoriasis. While it is effective, Coal Tar has a strong odor and can stain clothing.
- Topical Steroid Creams—these creams are applied daily for 2-3 weeks at a time, followed by remission or a break from the cream.
- Derivatives of Vitamin D in a topical cream
- Derivatives of Vitamin A in a topical cream
- Sunlight therapy

For individuals with widespread disease resistant to therapies listed above, oral medications can be used. The medications used orally are methotrexate, cyclosporine and Vitamin A derivatives. Due to the side effects of these medications they are reserved for resistant or more severe cases of psoriasis.

In times of remission, fragrance and dye free moisturizers can be used to keep skin from becoming too dry.

If you think you may have psoriasis, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. If you have any questions about the treatment of your psoriasis speak with your pharmacist today!



Rx Center— Why does my medication have 2 names?

Every medication enters the market with two names. The first name is its generic (or chemical) name. The second name is its brand name, usually something catchy and chosen by the manufacturer who has the patent on the medication.

Just like your generic cola versus the brand name Coca-Cola the **largest difference between the two is in the price!**



Brand name drugs are very costly. This is because the company producing them has spent anywhere from \$500 million to \$2 billion during the time the medication was discovered/produced to the time that it gets onto the market. This money is spent on

research and development as well as 3 phases of clinical trials required by Health Canada before the medication can be approved. The high cost of new brand name drugs is also what can prevent them from being covered under government insurance plans.

Once the patent on a new drug has expired, generic companies may begin to produce the drug. The generic companies have spent extremely little money on development and require only one trial proving their equivalency to the brand name product before they receive approval for sale from Health Canada. This allows generic companies to price their medications much lower. Additionally, the provincial government regulates how much generic companies can charge for the medication relative to the brand name companies. For example, in Alberta, generic companies making a new ge-

neric drug can only charge 45% of the price of the comparable brand name drug.

Brand and generic drugs contain the same active medication. For example Tylenol and generic acetaminophen both contain acetaminophen to decrease your pain or reduce your fever. However, they likely contain different “fillers”, or inactive ingredients. They also may vary slightly different in size, shape and color. Despite these differences, the brand and generic should work to treat your condition exactly the same!!



OTC Spotlight— Hydrocortisone 0.5% Cream

What is Hydrocortisone?

Hydrocortisone is a medication that belongs to a class of drugs called corticosteroids. This class of drugs are anti-inflammatory in nature and when used topically can also reduce itchiness.

Do you need a prescription for hydrocortisone cream?

Hydrocortisone, the weakest corticosteroid available, can be purchased without a prescription when it is in a concentration of 0.5%. All higher strengths and other corticosteroid creams require a prescription.

What is hydrocortisone cream used for?

Hydrocortisone cream can be used for a number of skin problems including: mild eczema, mild psoriasis, mosquito bites, and allergic rashes.

How is the hydrocortisone cream applied?

A small amount of cream can be applied to the affected area(s) once or twice daily for 5-7 days. The area to which the cream has been applied should be left un-covered. Do not use bandages after applying. If the condition worsens or does not improve, you should see your doctor.

What are the side effects of hydrocortisone cream?

When used correctly for short durations of time hydrocortisone cream should have little to no side effects. If used in high doses for prolonged periods of time, corticosteroid creams can cause permanent thinning of the skin. Additionally, your body may become tolerant to the effects and the cream may stop working.

Who should not use hydrocortisone cream?

Except on the advice of a physician or pharmacist, the following people should not use hydrocortisone cream:

- Infants/children
- Pregnant women

Hydrocortisone cream should also not be used on an area suspected to be infected.

If you have a minor rash or insect bite **check with your pharmacist** to see if hydrocortisone cream may help you. Your pharmacist will also be able to recommend other agents that may help or be better suited to treat your condition!



Newsletter Editor: Jaclyn Katelnikoff, Clinical Pharmacist
Reviewed By: Igor Shaskin, Clinical Pharmacist/Pharmacy Manager
Thanks again to our “guest” reviewer Brian J.

Want to receive our monthly Newsletter via E mail? Ask to join our

