

Employment and Work

People with psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis can sometimes find that their condition has an effect on other parts of their lives- notably, their work. Changes may need to be made in order to effectively manage their condition at work, and they may be asked questions about their health when starting a new job. Although there are certain occupations that could cause problems for people with psoriasis, these are very few; many professional avenues are open to people with psoriasis, especially when given the support they need from their employers.

Psoriasis

Here are some tips for managing your psoriasis at work:

- Educate your employer and colleagues about your condition. Although psoriasis awareness is increasing, there are still many people who do not know what it is, or do not understand the extent of the condition. People who work in occupations that involve direct contact with the customer (e.g. checkout operatives, hairdressers, children's nursery assistants) may experience wary looks or unkind comments from customers or colleagues. Explain that psoriasis is not contagious or infectious, but also be honest about how it might affect your abilities, the way it may make you feel, and the time-consuming nature of certain treatments. The Psoriasis Association can provide you with materials to help with this.
- Work with your employer to find solutions to help you do your job and manage your psoriasis at the same time. This might include working more flexible hours to accommodate medical appointments, extra sets of uniforms, protective clothing (e.g. gloves) to prevent worsening patches of psoriasis, or facilities to apply emollients.
- Don't forget the importance of moisturising your skin throughout the day. Dispense some of your moisturiser into a small pot that you can keep in your office, bag or locker, meaning you can then apply the moisturiser whenever it is convenient. If you regularly travel or stay away from home, you could also keep a separate moisturiser in your travel bag, to ensure you always have it with you.
- Moisturise with a lighter cream in the morning and a thicker ointment when going to bed. This should help to keep your skin moisturised, but also mean you don't feel greasy throughout the day.

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- It is understandable that you may wish to cover up your psoriasis for work or certain meetings or events. There are a number of camouflage products to help you do this, available either on prescription from a GP or via organisations such as Changing Faces (www.changingfaces.org.uk).

Problematic Occupations

Armed Forces- The Armed Forces have strict policies on recruiting people with health conditions. Widespread psoriasis is stated as a condition that precludes (prevents) entry to the army, RAF and navy. There are a number of reasons for this; service personnel often spend long periods in harsh conditions, with limited medical facilities, and experience periods of high mental and physical stress. A severe psoriasis flare-up could be debilitating, preventing that person from carrying out their duties and therefore putting themselves and others in danger. If your psoriasis is mild and you are considering a career in the Armed Forces, you should get in touch with the relevant careers centre to discuss your application.

Food Handling- Organisations in the food handling industry are cautious about employing people with skin conditions. The Food Standards Agency's *Fitness to Work Guidelines* (2009) state that no person with a skin infection or open sores, or suffering from a disease that is likely to be transmitted through food, should be permitted to handle food or enter a food handling area. **Psoriasis is not infectious or contagious**, and tends not to harbour bacteria or produce open sores. If the psoriasis is in an uncovered area, it can be easily covered by a distinctive, coloured dressing to ensure a person with the condition is fit to work in food handling.

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People with psoriasis on their hands may find repeated hand-washing, wet work and cold conditions may make it worse, and so should work with their employer to ensure protective gloves are available.

Physical, Outdoor, Construction- Cold or overly warm weather, wind, rain, and many industrial materials and chemicals can all worsen psoriasis. It's important, therefore, for the individual worker to know their limits and, again, work with their employer to ensure relevant protective clothing is available. However, the presence of psoriasis should not be a reason to not employ someone in this area.

Medical Professions- Again, the continuous hand-washing required to comply with hygiene standards may make psoriasis on the hands worse, but it may be possible to manage this through regular moisturising breaks. People who work in the medical professions must report any skin condition which makes it difficult to carry out hand hygiene procedures. They may

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require support from their superiors whilst they receive treatment, and may need to be moved to non-clinical duties for a period of time.

Anecdotally, leading psoriasis experts have stated that psoriasis is not particularly prone to infection or harbouring bacteria, however, any open wounds could pose a risk in a medical setting, and so should be covered. Patients may be wary of being treated by someone with a visible skin condition, and so it may be good practice to keep psoriasis covered by clothing or dressings, or to explain to patients what the condition is and that it is not contagious.

The professional bodies listed below publish guidance on hygiene, infection control and professional standards which can be consulted on this issue. Although careful planning and management is needed to ensure hygiene and safety standards are met by an employee with psoriasis; in most cases it is not a reason to not pursue a medical career.

General Medical Council <http://www.gmc-uk.org/>

Royal College of Nursing <http://www.rcn.org.uk/>

Royal College of Physicians <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/>

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Psoriatic Arthritis

Psoriatic arthritis, like other forms of arthritis, may affect movement, flexibility, and cause pain, which may impact on a person's ability to carry out their duties at work. As with psoriasis, the best way of dealing with this is to educate your employer and colleagues about your condition, explain how symptoms can come and go, and be honest about your abilities and any support you require.

The Law

The Equality Act (2010) defines a 'disability' as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to perform normal day-to-day activities. Although the effects of psoriatic arthritis can come and go, it is treated as a continuing disability if it is likely to recur.

The Equality Act (2010) requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled employees to do their job. This might include providing equipment to help employees operate technology or machinery, making changes to the premises to allow easy access, or allowing flexible working hours to accommodate medical appointments. Employers are, however, **only**

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obliged to do this if they are aware of their employee's disability, meaning it is crucial that the employee discusses their condition and the support they need with their employer.

There are also restrictions on what health or disability-related questions a potential employer can ask before at least short listing someone for a job. Questions about disability may be asked before this point, but must only be used to ascertain if any adjustments need to be made to the recruitment process. Once an applicant has been offered a job or included in a pool of successful applicants, they can then be asked further questions about their health or disability, in order to discuss what reasonable adjustments might need to be made in order to help them do the job. It is illegal for an employer to use these adjustments as a reason to not employ someone. Potential employers are able to ask questions about disability to ascertain whether or not an applicant can do something that is intrinsic to the job. For example, if applying to a construction agency, they could ask about the applicant's ability to climb ladders or lift heavy loads. It is still, however, best practice for an employer to ask about the applicant's ability to carry out the job with reasonable adjustments in place.

This is intended to be a guide to the issues that a person with psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis may encounter in employment, and is no way intended to be authoritative. If you need advice regarding discrimination or employment rights, please contact one of the organisations below:

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Equality Advisory Support Service

Phone: 0808 800 0082 **Textphone:** 0808 800 0084

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

The Citizen's Advice Bureau can offer advice regarding employment law:

For online advice, go to www.adviceguide.org.uk

For details of local offices:

England: www.citizensadvice.org.uk **Phone:** 03444 111 444

Wales: www.citizensadvice.org.uk **Phone:** 03444 77 20 20

Scotland: www.cas.org.uk **Phone:** 0808 800 9060

Northern Ireland: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/nireland

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The Equality Act 2010, can be viewed online at www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

For a list of resources used in the production of this information sheet, please contact the Psoriasis Association.

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This information sheet is currently undergoing a review