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psoriasis UK®



Scalp psoriasis



WHAT IS PSORIASIS?

Psoriasis is classed as an immune-mediated inflammatory disease (or IMID) which simply means that the immune system is not functioning correctly. In the case of psoriasis, the immune system is overactive, and this causes symptoms on the skin and can sometimes affect the joints.

When a person has psoriasis, their skin replacement process speeds up, taking just a few days to replace skin cells that usually take 21-28 days.

This results in a build-up of immature skin cells seen as raised patches of flaky skin covered with silvery scales (known as plaques) which can also be itchy. This process is usually the same wherever it appears on the body including the scalp although different types tend to occur in different areas. Scaling or thick plaques are not as common on the backs of the knees, armpits and genital areas.

Psoriasis is a long-term condition that can ebb and flow. There may be periods when you have no symptoms or mild symptoms followed by periods when it is more active. Whilst there is currently no cure available, it is possible to live well with psoriasis and there are many treatments available to help manage the condition.

WHAT IS SCALP PSORIASIS?

The scalp is one of the most common areas affected by plaque psoriasis and is often the first site affected. It can occur on parts of your scalp or across the whole scalp. It causes raised patches of skin often covered in thick scales.





WHAT DOES SCALP PSORIASIS LOOK LIKE?

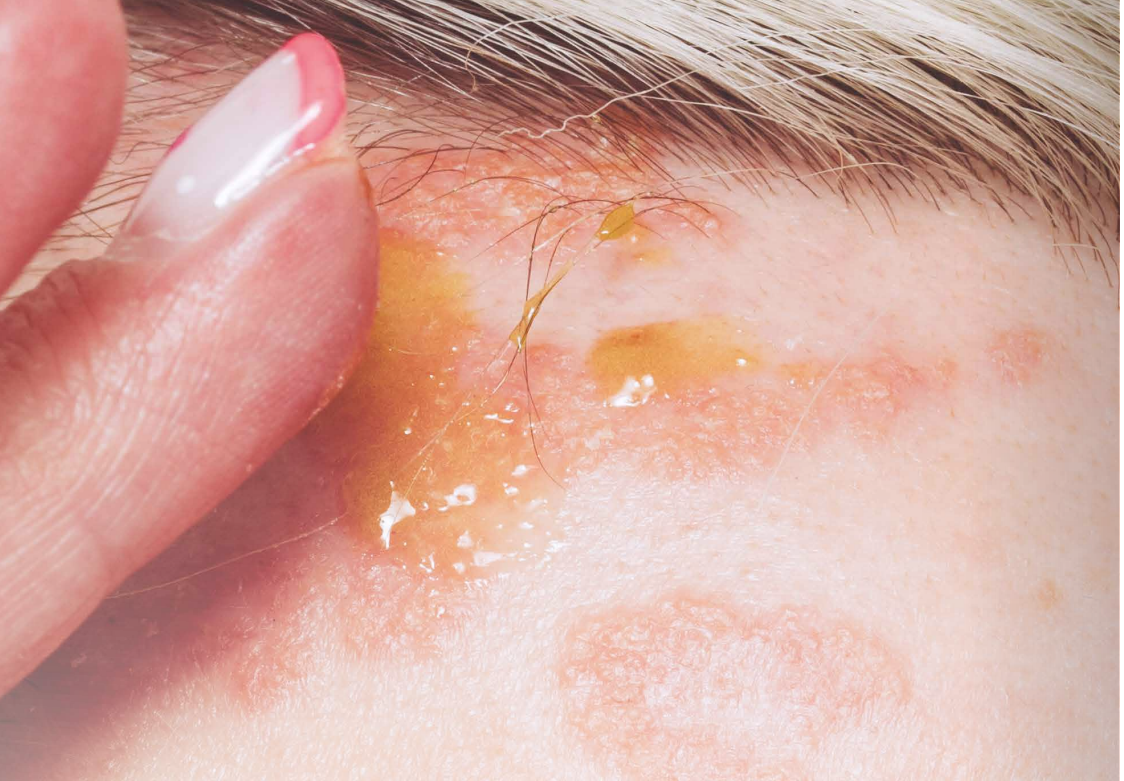
Scalp psoriasis appears as raised red (or dark on darker skin tones) patches of skin covered with silvery, white or yellow scaly skin. Loose scaly skin looks similar to dandruff and might be noticeable in the hair or on dark clothing. Scaly skin and redness might be noticeable around the sides of the scalp, on the forehead, neck and behind the ears.



HOW DOES SCALP PSORIASIS FEEL?

Some people with scalp psoriasis say that it feels itchy, tight or sore while others feel no discomfort.





TREATING SCALP PSORIASIS

There are many treatments available to help manage mild scalp psoriasis, many of which can be bought over the counter. Speak to a pharmacist for advice, as they can recommend medicated shampoos.

WHEN SHOULD I GO TO THE DOCTOR?

If your scalp psoriasis is more severe, red, sore and scaly, you may need prescribed treatments from your GP or nurse.

There are a range of treatments that can be prescribed including descaling ointments, topical steroids and vitamin D topical steroid combinations treatments as well as coal tar treatments including shampoos, lotions and ointments.

Various scalp treatments are available in cream, ointment, mousse, gel or shampoo formulations. If your scalp psoriasis is particularly difficult to treat, your GP may refer you to a Dermatologist, Dermatology Nurse Specialist, or GP with an Extended Role (GPwER) in skin.

Some systemic and biologic treatments used to treat more widespread psoriasis can also help with scalp psoriasis although they would be unlikely to be prescribed for scalp psoriasis alone and are normally only available from a Dermatologist.

APPLYING THE TREATMENTS

It is important to get the method of applying scalp treatment right. The treatment needs to be on the scalp rather than on the hair. Apply treatments to the scalp section by section by combing and parting your hair and gently massage them into the affected areas. You may need someone to help you to reach the top and back of your head properly.

You will find that some treatments need to be left on and some need to be washed out after a set period of time. Some treatments need to be applied daily; others are less frequent. You may have more than one treatment to apply. It may be that once your scalp psoriasis is under control you can use the medicated treatment less frequently in order to maintain the clearance.

As with topical treatments you may use on other body sites for psoriasis, it can take quite a bit of time each day to apply the treatments, and a few weeks before you notice an improvement in the appearance of your skin. Do follow the instructions that come with the product/s or the advice of your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

WHAT ABOUT COLOURING AND STYLING MY HAIR?



Scalp psoriasis does not necessarily mean you can't have hair treatments, but you do need to be careful. Certain things that do not touch the scalp, such as highlights, should be fine, and treatments that do touch the scalp (such as perms and dyes) will usually require a 'patch test' to be done in advance, to make sure you do not have a reaction. If there is broken skin on the scalp, then it is not advisable to have dyes or perms applied. You could speak to your Dermatology Nurse Specialist, if you have one, for advice.

You should try to limit or avoid hot hair styling as much as possible. Many hairdryers have cooler settings which can be used to help when drying.

It is always a good idea to discuss your scalp psoriasis with your hairdresser, who should have up to date information about possible options.

I AM TOO EMBARRASSED TO GO TO THE HAIRDRESSER

A good hairdresser should have been trained in various scalp conditions and should be able to help you manage your hair. Telephone in advance and speak to a stylist to explain the situation or try to find a hairdresser who will visit you at home.

MY HAIR IS COMING OUT!

Some people with severe scalp psoriasis may experience thinning of the hair. This is often because of a build-up of scale, or from scratching. This can be distressing, but any hair loss or thinning of the hair is normally only temporary and the hair usually re-grows in the area affected following effective treatment.

DOES IT GO AWAY?

Psoriasis tends to come and go. After treating their scalp psoriasis, some people may not have a further flare up while others may have periods of no scalp psoriasis followed by a flare up where it comes back again.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More information on treatments for scalp psoriasis is available from Psoriasis UK.

The information in this resource is not intended to replace that of a healthcare professional. If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment, do discuss this with your doctor. Always read the instructions that come with a treatment or medication to ensure you are using it correctly.



HELPFUL HINTS



- Brush and comb hair **gently and regularly**
- Buy some pillowcase protectors or keep a supply of old pillowcases for times when you are using treatments
- Give all treatments a good chance to work, it can take **a number of weeks** regularly using a treatment before you see a positive change
- Always read the instructions carefully on all treatments, as they can differ in **how they should be applied**, and **how frequently they need to be applied**
- If you are being asked to use more than one treatment, plan a regime that **works for you**
- Tell your GP or Dermatologist if any treatment is causing you problems or discomfort
- Talk to your GP about the **impact your scalp psoriasis is having on your wellbeing**. Keep a diary of how many times you experience a flare over six months and share this with them
- Try different hairstyles to cover any psoriasis on the hairline and reduce the use of hot hair styling
- Try using an oil to soften the scalp and make scaling easier to lift - **olive or coconut oil** are good examples
- Wearing **light coloured clothes** on the top half of your body can help to disguise falling flakes
- Keep up to date with new treatments - Psoriasis UK has more details.





PSORIASIS UK

We aim to help people with psoriasis by:

- Providing information, support and advice
- Raising public awareness and understanding
- Promoting and funding research
- Representing members interests at a local and national level.

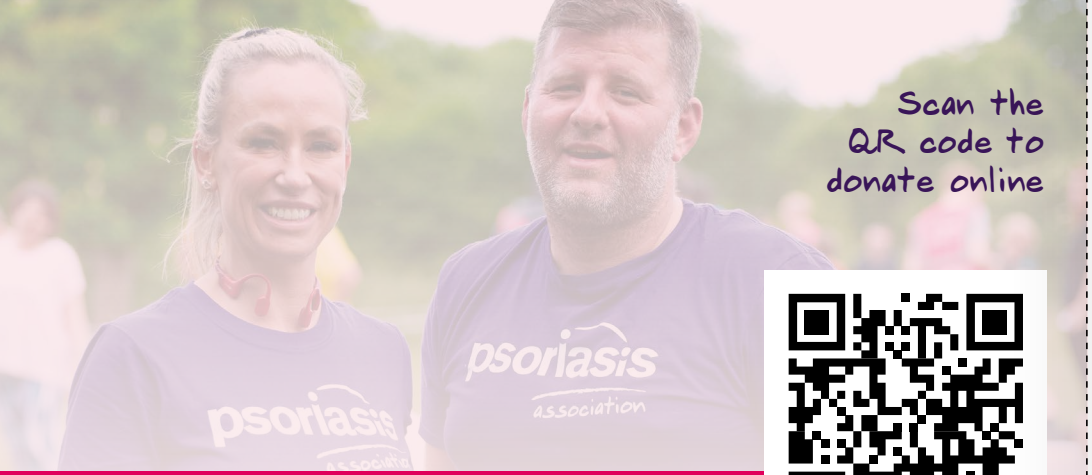
Become a member and you'll join a community of people who play a vital part in shaping our work – and who are determined to make sure that no-one has to face psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis alone.

Our members give a voice to the millions of people in the United Kingdom who live with psoriasis by pushing for change, sharing their own experiences and offering peer to peer support and advice.

THE BENEFITS

Members of Psoriasis UK receive:

- Our printed quarterly Membership Magazine, Pso, in the post
- A discounted rate to attend our renowned Annual Conference and AGM
- The chance to have your say in the way the organisation is run by voting for our trustees or by becoming a trustee yourself
- To be part of a community and to meet other people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis
- A full membership pack on application
- Access to a wealth of information and support resources, including our telephone, email and WhatsApp helpline services, websites and peer to peer support networks.



Scan the QR code to donate online

MAKE A DONATION

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Psoriasis UK will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 donated. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I must notify Psoriasis UK if I no longer pay tax or wish to cancel this declaration.

WE RELY ON THE GENEROSITY OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU...

Each year Psoriasis UK helps thousands of people whose lives have been affected by psoriasis via our website, helplines, our information resources and by raising awareness amongst the general public, healthcare professionals and parliamentarians. We invest in research to improve diagnosis, treatment and management for all types of psoriasis.

We do not receive any government funding and so rely entirely on your generosity to help us continue our vital work in supporting people, raising awareness and funding research.

MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information, or a list of resources used in the production of this leaflet, please contact Psoriasis UK.

The information in this resource is not intended to replace that of a healthcare professional. If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment, do discuss this with your doctor. If you are buying products over the counter, discuss them with the pharmacist and always read the label to make sure you are using them correctly.