

Backgrounder: Psoriasis

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What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a **chronic inflammatory condition** affecting **up to 3% of the world's population**, or more than **125 million people**^{1,2}. This common and distressing disease is not simply a cosmetic problem – even people with very mild symptoms find the condition affects their everyday lives^{1,2}.

There are several different types of psoriasis³. **Plaque psoriasis is the most common**, accounting for 80 to 95% of cases and is characterized by **thick and extensive skin lesions**, called plaques, known to cause **itching, scaling and pain**⁴.

More than one third of people with plaque psoriasis suffer from its **moderate-to-severe form**⁵, which can be **difficult to treat**⁶. People are considered to have moderate-to-severe symptoms when **more than 10% of their body surface is affected**, or when sensitive areas of the body are involved, such as the **hands or feet**, which can greatly impact quality of life^{7,8}.

Psoriasis symptoms can begin at any age, including in childhood, but the disease **mainly affects adults**⁶. Symptoms start when a combination of **environmental triggers and genetic factors** disrupt the lifecycle of skin cells⁴.

What is the immune system's role in psoriasis?

The immune system **produces over a dozen proteins called cytokines**, which serve as “messengers” that coordinate communication between immune cells in response to an infection. One of these cytokines, **interleukin-17A (IL-17A)** is considered to play a **key role** in the development of **psoriasis**^{9,10}.

If there are **increased levels of IL-17A in the skin**, it can trigger an immune response even if there is no threat of infection, causing inflammatory symptoms like **itching and redness**⁴. In addition, it signals to the skin to grow new cells at a faster rate than normal, resulting in characteristic psoriasis symptoms like **thickened skin and plaques** (scaly skin) because cells build up on the skin's surface⁴.

What are the physical and psychological effects of psoriasis?

Psoriasis **negatively affects** people's lives both **physically and psychosocially**^{11,12}. Physical symptoms are often painful and include **burning sensations, joint pain, itching and skin soreness**¹¹. These factors regularly **limit people's ability to undertake daily activities** and impact their psychological state¹¹.

In fact, the effect of psoriasis on people's **health-related quality of life** has been shown to be **similar to diseases such as cancer, heart disease, arthritis, type 2 diabetes and depression**¹¹. People with psoriasis also report **feelings of stigmatization** in society due the appearance of their skin, as well as **feelings of depression, feelings of unattractiveness, suicidal thoughts, financial distress and professional difficulties**^{3,11}.

A number of international studies also confirm that people with **more severe forms of psoriasis** have a **significantly reduced life expectancy**¹². This is because they are more likely to **suffer from a range of co-morbid conditions**, including diabetes, psoriatic arthritis, heart disease, obesity, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, psychiatric illness and cancer (lymphoma)¹².

What are the unmet needs in psoriasis?

Traditional treatments for psoriasis include **topical therapies** (creams and gels), **phototherapy** and **systemic medicines**⁶. However, there remains an **unmet need for new efficacious therapies that act faster and longer** to relieve the pain, itching and other disease symptoms^{4,13-15}.

Research illustrates that people with psoriasis regularly **lack confidence in available therapies**^{3,16-18}, **with approximately 40-50% reporting dissatisfaction with their current options**^{3,17}. Concerns with perceived **treatment inefficacy and side effects** have broader implications, with a survey of 1,095 people with psoriasis demonstrating they are the main reasons for **discontinuing therapy**¹⁹.

Therefore, **effective treatment** is high on the agenda **for improving the lives of people living with psoriasis**.

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