

How Well Are You Managing Psoriasis?

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You're on the way.

Your score indicates that while you've mastered the basics of managing your psoriasis, you need to brush up on a few things. To become a pro at managing your psoriasis, follow these helpful tips:

See a specialist

Dermatologists are the best professionals to see for psoriasis because they specialize in conditions of the skin. "Dermatologists, because they're specialists, are also better versed in the newest treatments of psoriasis," says Joel Schlessinger, MD, a dermatologist and a president emeritus of the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology and Aesthetic Surgery.

If your insurance won't cover multiple visits to a specialist like a dermatologist, [Cheryl Lee Eberting, MD, a dermatologist in Alpine, Utah](#), suggests that you consult a dermatologist for an initial diagnosis and treatment plan, which can then be monitored by your internist.

Maintain moisture

Apply a fragrance-free and preservative-free moisturizer once a day, ideally after bathing, to keep your skin healthy and protect it from chafing. The skin on your face and neck is especially sensitive and responds best to a moisturizer that's specifically formulated for those areas.

"Don't forget to apply moisturizer to your hands and feet," says Dr. Eberting. Hands and feet are sometimes neglected but are at risk for a psoriasis flare.

Forgo fragrances

It's best to steer clear of perfumes and colognes because they may irritate your skin — especially if you're experiencing a flare. However, if you're going out for a special occasion and want to wear perfume or cologne, Eberting advises spraying the scent on your clothes, not your skin: "That will lessen the chance that the fragrance will irritate your skin."

And don't forget to wash your clothes in fragrance-free and dye-free detergent. "This will reduce the chances that your clothes will feel itchy or irritate your skin," says Dr. Schlessinger.

Say no to stress

“Stress over your job or finances can actually trigger a psoriasis flare or prolong one,” says Schlessinger. Flares can also be prolonged by stress over possible reactions by others to the condition of your skin. One way to relieve stress is to maintain a strong support network. The compassionate ear of a friend or family member can help alleviate stress and reduce the chance of a flare. Relaxation techniques such as yoga and meditation can also help relieve stress.

Keep talking

“It’s important to have routine checkups with your dermatologist to monitor your symptoms and make sure your current treatment plan is effective,” says Schlessinger. And even if your psoriasis is currently in remission, you should check in regularly with your dermatologist. Says Schlessinger, “That will reduce the chances of a flare.”

Now that you’ve learned the basics, read on for the answers to the quiz questions.

1. Whom do you see to treat and manage your psoriasis?

Best answer — A dermatologist

Psoriasis is often mistaken for many other conditions, and as a result, inappropriate and inadequate treatment is given. Dermatologists are trained to recognize the various forms of psoriasis and to treat it in many different ways.

2. How often do you apply moisturizer to areas of skin affected by psoriasis?

Best answer — Once a day

Moisturizers are very helpful for keeping your skin healthy. And every square inch of your skin can benefit from their daily use. Doctors say you should apply a moisturizer every day — even if you’re not experiencing a flare-up. Skin that’s red, flaky, and itchy must stay hydrated and protected.

3. You have soft water in your home.

Answer — True

Hard water can dry out your skin, and overly dry skin can trigger a psoriasis flare. If you have hard water, consider installing a water softener to prevent psoriasis flares and keep your skin properly hydrated. If you’re not sure whether your water is hard, you can purchase a water-testing kit at your local hardware store — they’re usually available for under \$10.

4. How often do you wear cologne or perfume?

Best answer — None of the above

The alcohol in fragrances may cause stinging or burning — especially if you’re experiencing a flare. The scent in perfumes and colognes can act as an irritant or allergen and actually induce or exacerbate a flare.

5. How often do you feel stressed?

Best answer — Once a month or less

Stress is a proven trigger of psoriasis flare-ups, often provoking the initial flare or aggravating an existing flare. It's also the trigger that doctors say is most easily avoidable.

6. You run a humidifier in your home or office.

Best answer — True

Dry air can aggravate the skin flaking and itchiness that's common during a psoriasis flare. Doctors suggest maintaining a humidity level of 35 to 45 percent to keep your skin properly hydrated and to better control your symptoms.

7. How often do you exercise?

Best answer — Once a day

Being overweight or stressed can trigger a psoriasis flare. Exercising regularly helps you maintain a healthy weight and manage stress, which in turn reduces the chance that you'll have a flare.

8. You are a smoker.

Best answer — False

Studies have shown that smoking can trigger and prolong a psoriasis flare because nicotine taxes the immune system, leaving it unable to fight a flare. If you do smoke, doctors suggest quitting to better control your psoriasis, as well as to improve your overall health.

9. Which type of soap do you use to wash your hands or in the shower?

Best answer — All of the above.

Soaps that are gentle, nonscented, and free of dyes are the least irritating to your skin. A soap that's also antibacterial will help reduce the risk of infection during a flare. If your scalp is affected, choose a shampoo that's either tar-based or salicylic acid-based.

10. You keep a psoriasis symptom journal to track flares and triggers.

Best answer — True

Doctors suggest listing the parts of your body, and how much, that are affected by each flare, and what physical symptoms (redness, itching, flaking, and so forth) you experience. You should also note what you did to treat the flare, your stress level, and any changes in lifestyle, such as a change of soap or laundry detergent. This will help you and your doctor pinpoint the things that are most likely to cause your flares and when you're most likely to experience a flare.

11. How many alcoholic beverages do you drink?

Best answer — One a month or less

Doctors say that drinking alcohol is one of the most common triggers of psoriasis flares. Like nicotine, alcohol can compromise your immune system and make it harder for you to control or clear up a flare.