



EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF
DERMATOLOGY AND VENEREOLOGY

Information Leaflet for Patients

SKIN CARE TIPS FOR PSORIASIS

The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet is designed to help you understand more about skin care in psoriasis: it tells you about skin care tips for different regions of the body affected by psoriasis, including the face, nails, genitals, and scalp, as well as shaving advice.

SKIN CARE TIPS FOR PSORIASIS

Why is skin care important in psoriasis?

If you have psoriasis, your skin is a highly demanding organ: it needs a lot of proper care! Healthy skin requires good care as well, such as skin hydration, but in psoriasis it is crucial. The first rule is to moisturize your skin very well if you have psoriasis, especially right after taking a shower or a bath. The second rule is to be gentle with your skin in order to protect it from damaging factors and avoid the “Koebner phenomenon” (see leaflet “*Psoriasis: A closed look*”) for further information). The third rule is: your skin is unique! Make sure to understand that skin care for your face differs from that of your hands. The last rule is continuity. The best skin care is not an intensive day per week, but a daily routine. It is not easy at first, but the longer you take good daily care of your skin, the more improvement you will experience.

How can you take care of psoriasis on your face?

Having psoriasis on your face is annoying, not only because you can't hide your face, but also because your facial skin is thinner and thus more sensitive to treatments. Although it is not a common place for lesions to appear, it is crucial to know that it requires a different approach than lesions elsewhere on your body (e.g. legs or torso). If you have lesions on your face, try to see a clinician as soon as possible so he/she can prescribe you the most appropriate treatment for facial skin. Be careful when applying treatment, especially around the eyes. Eyelids are very thin and can thus be easily damaged.

In case medicine gets in contact with your eyes, make sure to rinse excessively with water and ask your clinician for advice. For instance, excessive use of corticosteroids around and in your eyes may lead to *glaucoma* and *cataracts*. Be careful and ask for advice whenever you're not sure about a treatment for your face.

As facial skin is more sensitive, you can take preventive measures. When you rinse your face, make sure to use mild cleaning products. Consult your dermatologist or pharmacist for the most appropriate products that are suited to your skin quality. When drying your skin, gently pad your skin dry with a towel instead of rubbing (as rubbing aggravates lesions), then apply an appropriate moisturizer immediately afterwards.

Should you have psoriasis around your ears and ear canal, make sure to be careful when applying ointment or creams, as eardrums are very sensitive. If you feel that the psoriasis is deep within your ear canal, it is best to see a clinician; it may be possible that the lesions block your ear canal and thus impair your hearing. Fortunately, the psoriatic blockage can be removed by your clinician. Be careful though and do not attempt to do this yourself. Your clinician has special instruments for procedure to guarantee your safety. It is in your best interest to not do this yourself as you may cause skin injury within your ear canal, resulting in the “Koebner phenomenon” and more lesions...

How can you take care of nail psoriasis?

Half of people with psoriasis suffer from *nail psoriasis*. This includes nail *pitting* (indents in the nail), separation of the nail with brown colouration known as the “oil drop phenomenon,” with thickened and crumbling nails (*nail dystrophy*). It is difficult to treat, especially since your nails only grow 0.1 mm each day; it may take a long time before you see any improvement when treating your nails! However, there are some tips to control your *nail psoriasis*: keep your nails short, but trim carefully without inflicting wounds, and use a nail file to smooth the edges. Wear gloves when you're cleaning or working (e.g. cleaning dishes or gardening). Do not trim the cuticle, avoid rough cleaning of your nails when dirty,

avoid acrylic nails, and avoid damage to your nails in general. It is recommended to apply a protective layer of nail polish, which may be transparent or coloured.

How can you take care of *genital psoriasis*?

Psoriasis can occur in the pubic area, and is referred to as *genital psoriasis*. Half of the people with psoriasis will be confronted with *genital psoriasis*, independent of age and gender. Importantly, these lesions can pose a heavy burden on the quality of your (sex) life. Treatment is possible, but is generally different from “normal” psoriasis since the concentrations of the active ingredients are often too high for *genital psoriasis*. The skin in your pubic area is thinner and thus more sensitive, leading to side effects if treatment is not adapted. Therefore, less concentrated treatments are required. Mild ointments and creams will usually be used, and an oily ointment will be recommended to increase your comfort. It is best to avoid hot water and soaps that may dry your skin. Generally, it is also recommended to avoid scented products in the pubic area. Finally, make sure not to diagnose *genital psoriasis* yourself, as many skin rashes in the genital area may look alike. Consult an expert for a correct diagnosis.

How can you take care of flakes on your scalp?

One of the most frustrating things about psoriasis is probably the flakes, especially when the scalp is affected! In addition to following your treatment as prescribed, you can take additional measures to keep those flakes in control. Firstly, if you use a

topical treatment, your lesions should be accessible, but they are often hampered by the layer of flakes on top of your lesions. You can use salicylic acid or urea to remove the scaling. Do not scrub or exfoliate, as this will aggravate your lesions!

In case you have *scalp psoriasis*, you can loosen the scales by covering your scalp with coconut oil or a prescribed ointment overnight. Make sure to avoid staining your pillow by putting on a shower cap and a towel over it. The next morning, you can use a mild shampoo to remove as much oil or ointment as possible, before rinsing it with water.

Water will not dissolve the oil or ointment, so make sure to apply a sufficient amount of shampoo to neutralize the oil or ointment. Scales and crusts can be removed with a comb, but gently to avoid skin injury. Next, wash your hair as usual: either with a mild shampoo or a coal tar shampoo. Some may dislike the smell of coal tar shampoo; you can “hide” the smell by washing your hair with a good-smelling shampoo. To do this, apply the scented shampoo on the tip of your hair locks, make the shampoo lather and distribute the foam upwards on the remaining length of your hair, staying 3 cm away from your scalp. Then, gently rinse your hair.

Another alternative is to discuss with your hairstylist which hairdo suits you best (for example, longer hair will conceal lesions near your hairline). Lastly, if you are very self-conscious of the flakes, you can camouflage them by wearing lighter colours or patterns. Adding a patterned scarf to your outfit allows you to easily shake off the flakes.

SKIN CARE TIPS FOR PSORIASIS

What is practical advice for shaving with psoriasis?

In case you need epilation (eyebrows or upper lip) or shaving (beard, mustache, legs, etc.), use mild products. Shaving may be a part of your daily routine, but it is essential

to do this as gently as possible. Below are some tips that are applicable for the face and the rest of the body. Do not use wax, as this will only exacerbate or lead to the development of lesions. ■

Shaving tips

DON'T!

- Avoid warm or cold wax, even on healthy looking skin (“Koebner phenomenon”)
- Avoid skin damage (“Koebner phenomenon”)
- Avoid irritation (“Koebner phenomenon”)
- Avoid aggressive (scented or alcohol-containing) hair-removal products
- Avoid peeling products
- Avoid disposable razors
- Avoid shaving the same area repeatedly at one time
- Avoid aftershaves

DO!

- Always be gentle, this includes taking your time
- Use high quality (electric) razors
- Make sure the blades are clean and not clogged with remaining soap, hair, and flakes
- Find a mild shaving oil with natural ingredients
- Try a cheap mild conditioner for sensitive skin as a shaving product
- Take good care of your skin afterwards: moisturize well
- Consider permanent laser hair removal; ask your doctor for advice
- Always apply a moisturizing product to your face and body to protect you from weather elements such as wind, rain, and sun (use sunblock).