

Hands

Psoriasis can appear on the hands in a number of ways. Psoriasis on the palms of the hands may be at type of pustular psoriasis, also known as **palmar plantar pustulosis** – more information can be found out about this on the *Pustular information sheet*. Nail psoriasis may also be present – more information on this can be found on the *Nails information sheet*. This information sheet covers common plaque psoriasis, which can occur on the backs of the hands and fingers.

Psoriasis on the hands can be distressing because it is visible and can be painful, irritating, or make it difficult to carry out everyday tasks. Because of this, hand psoriasis can also cause problems at work. For example, people with hand psoriasis may find jobs that require repeated hand washing, or working in wet, cold or harsh conditions difficult. There have also been some cases of employers expressing concern over psoriasis, especially in food handling or medical professions. *You can contact the Psoriasis Association for more information and advice on employment issues.*

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Psoriasis on the hands can be very noticeable, and is difficult to cover up. If you notice someone staring at your hands, or are asked about it, try to explain that you have psoriasis, and that it is not contagious.

What causes hand psoriasis?

As with all types of psoriasis, hand psoriasis is the result of overactivity in the immune system, which causes skin cells to reproduce at a much faster rate than usual. This causes the redness and flaky build-up of skin cells that is seen on the skin. Psoriasis can develop anywhere on the body, including on the backs of the hands.

Injury to skin is known to trigger psoriasis for some people, and in some cases this can even include friction from jewellery and watches. Anything that irritates or dries out the skin, such as over-washing, using detergents (such as soap), harsh temperatures, conditions or manual labour, may trigger or worsen psoriasis on the hands. The same may sometimes be true of rubber gloves, but some people with hand psoriasis find protective gloves made of other substances to be acceptable. As with many aspects of psoriasis, this is often a process of trial and error.

Treating psoriasis on the hands

As with all types of psoriasis, moisturising is important. This can help to improve the feel of the skin, and reduce irritation, soreness, flaking and cracking – all of which are important on the hands. There is some evidence to suggest that moisturising can help other ‘active’ topical (applied to skin) treatments to be more effective. You should wait for moisturiser to be fully absorbed before putting an ‘active’ topical treatment on top.

For most people, treatment of hand psoriasis will start with topical treatments, such as vitamin D preparations, corticosteroids, amongst others. Because the hands are in constant use, it might not always be practical to use certain treatments – you should always discuss treatment options with your doctor, and consider your treatment routine carefully. More information on the different types of topical treatment is available from the Psoriasis Association.

Some people might have hand psoriasis that is particularly severe, or that doesn’t improve with topical treatment. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that anybody whose psoriasis is unable to be controlled with topical treatment should be referred to a Dermatologist. It also recommends that if psoriasis is severe, or causing ‘major functional or cosmetic impairment’, they should also be referred to a Dermatologist. This may be relevant for people who find that their hand psoriasis has a major impact on their ability to carry out simple tasks, or is causing them to feel low. A Dermatologist or GP should also be made aware if hand psoriasis is causing issues at work.

After- or alongside – topical treatment, a Dermatologist may offer ultraviolet (UV) light treatment, which can be used to treat the whole body, or can be concentrated on one area. If hand psoriasis is particularly severe or does not respond to UV treatment, or if there is severe psoriasis across the rest of the body, a Dermatologist may recommend systemic (tablet) or biologic (injection) treatments, which work by reducing the activity of the immune system. However, in the majority of cases, an individual will have had to have tried all other treatments (topicals, UV) before being offered these.

More in-depth information on psoriasis treatments is available from the Psoriasis Association.

Tips for coping with hand psoriasis

Much of the advice below has been gained through the experience of Psoriasis Association members, enquirers, trustees and medical advisors. You may not be able to do all of the below, but even doing one or two of these things could help to improve hand psoriasis.

- Use a soap substitute when washing hands. Normal soaps can be quite drying, and can worsen existing psoriasis or dry skin. Soap substitutes or emollient cleansers (a list of which can be obtained from the Psoriasis Association) clean just as well, but moisturise at the same time.
- Dry hands gently, and moisturise them afterwards. Keep tubes of moisturiser by the sink at home, as well as in your handbag or pocket, at work or school, and anywhere else you spend time.
- Cotton gloves can help moisturiser to penetrate the skin and work more effectively, so consider purchasing a pair and wearing at night, or whilst in the house. It is not always suitable to wear these after applying an 'active' topical treatment – do check with a healthcare professional.
- Use plastic or rubber gloves with cotton linings when doing the washing up or hand washing clothes, and always wear protective gloves when using chemicals, solvents or cleaners, or when doing manual work (such as in the garden).
- Wear warm gloves in winter – cold weather can be particularly drying to the skin.
- If the psoriasis is on your hands and not your fingers, you may find that cutting the tips off the gloves gives you more flexibility in carrying out jobs.
- Wearing rings, watches and other jewellery could trigger psoriasis in those areas, or make existing psoriasis worse. Try removing your jewellery for a few days, and see what effect (if any) this has. Psoriasis is not an allergy, but some people do find that hand psoriasis is aggravated by jewellery that is made from nickel, for example, rather than precious metals.
- Remember to give the hands plenty of rest.

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

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