



# Itching

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Itching, also referred to by the medical term 'pruritus', can be a problem for people with psoriasis. In fact, the word 'psoriasis' comes from the Greek 'psor', which means 'of itching'.

In the past, it has been mistakenly stated that psoriasis is not particularly itchy. Most modern-day medical professionals accept that this is incorrect; many people with psoriasis do experience itching, burning and discomfort. Everybody with psoriasis is different, and it is just as normal to have psoriasis that itches as it is to have no itching.

Much of the advice on this sheet is the result of 'anecdotal evidence' – suggestions and advice gathered from other people with psoriasis, through the Psoriasis Association membership and helpline, and by talking to doctors and nurses.

## Ideas to reduce Itching

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- Skin is often itchy because it is dry, and so keeping the skin well moisturised is important. One way to combat itch is by using a moisturiser frequently – carry a small amount with you throughout the day.
- Water and soap dry out the skin, therefore it is very important to moisturise after a bath or shower.
- Avoid irritants such as soaps, bubble bath, detergents and any fabrics that seem to irritate. Cotton clothes are usually comfortable for people with skin conditions, and certain emollients can be used as soap substitutes.
- Some mild steroid creams and ointments have anti-itch properties – these are available from a pharmacist, or on prescription from your GP. Similarly, some moisturisers have anti-itch properties; look out for 'lauromacrogols' (an ingredient with similar properties to a local anaesthetic, which helps to relieve and soothe itchy skin) in the list of ingredients.
- There are a number of anti-itch creams available over-the-counter, and some people find that topical applications containing Capsaicin (an ingredient derived from hot peppers) can relieve itching. This can be purchased in a pharmacy or health food shop.

- Although there is some debate surrounding the effectiveness of antihistamines in psoriasis itch, some people find that they help. It is advisable to speak to the pharmacist or your doctor regarding anti-histamine tablets as some can cause drowsiness or may interact with other medicines you are taking. This can be useful if itching is a problem at night time as the anti-histamine can be taken before bedtime, and can help people sleep through their itching. There are non-drowsy anti-histamines also which can be used if itching is bothersome in the daytime.
- Keep nails short to limit any damage done to the skin by scratching. Try not to scratch if at all possible. It is thought that scratching can make itch worse and an 'itch - scratch' cycle may develop with regular scratching. (That is, you itch more because you scratch, so you scratch more because you itch more, and so on). Picking at plaques can also make psoriasis worse, increase itching and discomfort and encourage infection – try not to pick if at all possible.
- Try to keep cool. You could try having a cool shower, or apply cold, wet towels to the area that is causing the itch. Keeping emollients or moisturisers in the fridge can also create a cooling, soothing effect.

## Genital Itching

Psoriasis in the genital region can cause itching for some people and may be very uncomfortable. Some people find aloe vera or other soothing products helpful. Use a shower or bath emollient, or soap substitute to wash with – traditional bubble baths, shower gels and soaps can be particularly drying to the skin and cause the itch to worsen. Soap substitutes and emollients cleanse the skin, but do not have the same drying effect. There are many emollients on the market that you can purchase in supermarkets and pharmacies, but which can also be obtained on prescription.

As with more generalised itching, oral anti-histamines might be useful if relief is not found with topical applications. Nappy rash products such as Sudocrem and Drapolene can also help alleviate itch and can be soothing to an inflamed area if they are chilled before use. The type of underwear you wear matters, too. Cotton or silk undergarments are preferable to nylon, and these should be loose-fitting.

*More information on treating psoriasis in the genital or other areas is available from the Psoriasis Association.*

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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