



Patient Information Sheet: Psoriatic Arthritis

What is psoriatic arthritis?

- Psoriatic arthritis is a condition that causes pain and swelling in some joints and scaly patches on some areas of the body.
- It usually affects the wrists, knees, ankles, finger and toe joints. It can also affect the spine and sacroiliac joints (lower back).
- Psoriasis is a skin disease that can be associated with psoriatic arthritis.
- Psoriasis appears as a scaly skin rash on the elbows, knees and scalp. It can also cause your nails to lift and pit.

How common is psoriatic arthritis?

- Approximately 10% of those with psoriasis will get psoriatic arthritis.
- Psoriasis affects men and women equally, usually between the ages of 20 and 50.

What causes psoriatic arthritis?

- A family history of psoriasis plays a role in the development of psoriatic arthritis.
- Psoriasis affects men and women equally, usually between the ages of 20 and 50.

How do you know if you have psoriatic arthritis?

- There will be pain and swelling in joints (fingers or toes) giving them a “sausage” appearance.
- A thorough physical examination will help in making a diagnosis.
- X-rays are often ordered to look for changes to the bone.
- Blood and joint fluid tests are ordered to rule out other conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, reactive arthritis or gout.

How is psoriatic arthritis treated?

Medication

- For mild psoriatic arthritis the treatment plan is made up of medication, physiotherapy and daily-living adjustments.
- Medications that are used to relieve pain are pain relievers and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- NSAIDs may increase your risk of stomach upset and bleeding in the gut. Let your doctor know if you experience stomach pain, indigestion or black stools.
- Other prescribed medications are the recently approved cyclooxygenase-2 inhibitors (COX-2) class of medications. Like other NSAIDs, COXIBs have similar effectiveness to older NSAIDs in reducing pain and swelling. COXIBs do not prevent joint damage. They may be used if you are at risk of stomach upset or other gastrointestinal (GI) risk factors.
- Cortisone injections may be used to control tendinitis or acutely swollen joints.
- Patients with more severe psoriatic arthritis will be given disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), including methotrexate.
- Topical creams are used to prevent the skin from drying out. Activities that worsen the skin symptoms should be avoided. Humidifiers are a must during winter months as they help prevent the skin from becoming too dry.
- Light mineral oil, petroleum jelly, cocoa butter are moisturizers that work well.
- Products made of coal tar have been shown to be effective for disease sites.
- PUVA (psoralen plus long-wave ultraviolet A light) therapy is effective for treating psoriasis.

For medications prescribed by your doctor, it is important to know:

Name(s) (generic and brand):

How much to take:

When to take it:

How quickly will it work:

For how long should it be taken:

Side effects to look out for:

Exercise

- Exercise helps reduce pain, prevents further joint damage and maintains a healthy weight.
- Not using a sore joint will cause the muscles around it to become weak and result in pain.

Protect Your Joints

- Pace yourself by alternating heavy or repeated tasks with easy ones or rest.
- Position your body to avoid stress on joints.
- Use helpful devices in your daily tasks such as carts, enlarged handles, canes and grab bars.

Heat/Cold

- Heat helps relax aching muscles, joint pain and soreness, for example, a hot shower.
- Cold helps numb an area, for example, an ice pack.

Relaxation

- Relaxing the muscles reduces joint pain.
- Relaxation can include deep breathing exercises, listening to music, visualization, prayer, meditation or listening to relaxation tapes.

For More Information...

This fact sheet is just a brief look at psoriatic arthritis. For more information or if you have any questions, ask your doctor or pharmacist, or call The Arthritis Society at 1-800-321-1433. You can also visit The Arthritis Society's Web site at www.arthritis.ca.

Questions to ask your doctor at your next visit:

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