



Dermatological Society of Malaysia **Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia (PDM)**

KULIT – Living with Psoriasis PDM Campaign 2007

(Article 4 – ‘L’ – Living Day-to-Day with Psoriasis)

Living day-to-day with psoriasis

This six-part KULIT article series by the Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia aims to raise awareness of psoriasis. In this fourth article, PDM President Dr Allan Yee shares some insights about the day-to-day aspects of living with psoriasis.

Psoriasis affects people of all ages – children, teenagers, adults, the elderly. Some people develop it in childhood; others develop it in later years.

Some experience extended periods without symptoms. Many others, however, live with psoriasis on an ongoing basis. The disease becomes a daily challenge affecting work, social situations, relationships and self-worth.

Psoriasis changes you physically because of the lesions that appear on the skin. It can also affect you emotionally. Psoriasis affects various age groups differently. Here are some points to remember which we hope will help you.

Adults

For many adults, the daily challenge is about living with psoriasis, while at the same time earning a living. Work can be stressful under normal circumstances; with psoriasis, it may become even more so.

Moreover, stress is a known trigger for psoriasis; the cycle of “illness-stress-more illness-depression” is thus all too common.

How will a client react if I shake his or her hand? Will my skin draw attention away from my PowerPoint presentation? How should I respond if my employer offers me the option of working from home?

These are issues which individuals must work out for themselves, and there are no set answers. But certainly, a healthy level of self-esteem goes a long way towards turning these into non-issues. Cultivating a sense of humour is essential so that one does not take oneself and life too seriously. Read and apply Edward de Bono’s works on lateral thinking which is akin to creative



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thinking and humour. It has been shown that laughter releases the feel-good natural opiates which may well help one de-stress and make one's psoriasis better.

What about the questions that one faces daily, including those from strangers, and those asked with little or no tact? But then on the other hand, awkward silences are sometimes even more uncomfortable for people with psoriasis. Questions – factual, to-the-point, and above all asked with sincerity and sensitivity – can greatly ease a situation. Most people simply want to know what it is, how you developed it, and how you take care of it.

Of course, allow yourself some leeway. For example, to better cope on "low-energy" days, you may minimise the possibility of questions simply by wearing long sleeves.

Treatment is an integral part of living with psoriasis. However, busy working adults may find it hard put – it can take up to half an hour or more to apply treatment creams to large areas of affected skin. Oral or injectable forms of treatment are more convenient – these include the standard oral methotrexate, retinoids, cyclosporine and the injectable biologic agents. For a busy daily schedule, these treatments may be the least intrusive.

However, whether one is suited for topical, oral or injectable treatments is a matter to be discussed with your physician. The treatment plan must be individualized – are there other conditions that preclude certain forms of treatments? For example, if one also has high blood pressure they would not be suitable for cyclosporine; psoriatics with high cholesterol should not be given retinoids; patients with liver problems would not be suitable for methotrexate. The injectable biologics would be ideal for these patients. But for their high cost, biologics would be the ideal treatments for those unable to take conventional therapies. Certainly it is beholden on the authorities to try to make biologics available to deserving cases as studies have shown that severe psoriasis adversely impacts quality of life, as much as cancer, arthritis or depression. These are issues of medical equity which is beyond the scope of this article, but certainly something we cannot ignore.

Children

In addition to facing the same general problems of adult patients, children with psoriasis face specific challenges. With fewer pre-conceived notions than adults, children can be more accepting of variations in physical appearance. That said, they can also be particularly insensitive. What for most kids is the daily joy of going to the playground can instead become a dreaded daily nightmare for children with psoriasis.

Helping your child is not just helping "for the moment" – it also determines the child's development in later years. So, make sure you constantly affirm your child's self-worth, and reassure him or her of your love and support. Our attitude will shape our children's, so be positive and upbeat. Psoriasis is not the end of a normal childhood! There are many effective ways to effectively treat it so that your child can lead a normal and active life.

Proper emotional guidance will determine a child's future. A confident child will not only be better able to handle the inevitable teasing from others, but will likely also grow up better equipped to handle later challenges. Educating teachers and other adults at school can also be helpful.



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Teenagers

At a time of significant and confusing physical changes, teenagers can be significantly affected by psoriasis. Adolescence is also when social situations take on more importance, as teens start dating, attending parties, and interacting in their own groups. Pimples are enough to upset the average teenager, psoriatic plaques more so.

Childhood and adolescence are when individuals start to form a sense of identity and self-worth; it is thus vital that they grow up knowing that psoriasis does not exclusively determine who they are. They should be assured that their skin condition is not the determining factor in life's important decisions – college, career, independence, relationships, and being who they want to be.

The elderly

If psoriasis can pose challenges at the playground and at the office, it can certainly do so at the old folk's home, or even for that matter, elderly people lovingly cared for by family members. Those with psoriasis are also at risk of developing psoriatic arthritis, which can impede mobility and a person's sense of independence.

As with any ailment afflicting the elderly, caregivers should be mindful of the fact that old patients may not be fully able to express or articulate their condition and their needs.

Next month, we shall look at ways in which interaction – with family members, friends, support groups, and associations – can help people with psoriasis.

Psoriasis affects 2-3 percent of Malaysians. This is the fourth of a six-part series from PDM's "KULIT – Living with Psoriasis" Campaign 2007. For more on psoriasis, treatment options and KULIT, visit www.dermatology.org.my or email kulitcampaign@yahoo.com. This article is a guide to help you better understand psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Consult a suitably qualified medical practitioner before acting on any information contained above. KULIT is a community programme sponsored by Wyeth Malaysia.