



**Beyond**  
Expectations

# Psoriasis and Relationships

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PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES OF *Johnson & Johnson*



## Introduction

Maintaining good relationships can be difficult at the best of times, but adding a long-term condition like psoriasis into the mix may make things even more complicated. Psoriasis does not just affect the people living with it – friends, family members, romantic partners and even colleagues can feel the impact too.

This guide aims to give practical advice on how to navigate different types of relationships when psoriasis is part of the picture. It is for people who may be living with psoriasis themselves and for the people around them.



## What is psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a chronic, painful and disabling disease that can appear on any part of the body.<sup>1,2</sup> There are different types of psoriasis.<sup>2</sup> The most common form is plaque psoriasis, which usually leads to patches of thick red skin covered with silvery scales known as plaques.<sup>3</sup>

Psoriasis is caused by a problem in the body's immune system, where certain immune cells (T-cells) are triggered and become overactive. These cells start producing inflammatory reactions that in turn lead to the rapid growth of skin cells, causing plaques to form.<sup>4</sup> For people with psoriasis some days are better than others. A flare-up of psoriasis can be triggered by many different things, including stress, hormonal changes and injuries to the skin.<sup>4</sup>

**Psoriasis is not contagious. It is not something you can 'catch' or that others can catch from you.<sup>2</sup>**

Psoriasis does not just affect the skin, it can affect other parts of the body and is closely linked with other conditions such as:<sup>5</sup>

- Psoriatic arthritis, a condition affecting the joints and muscles
- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular diseases
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure

Just as importantly, people with psoriasis often struggle with depression and anxiety.<sup>5</sup> You can find out more about the impact of psoriasis in the [Mental Health and Psoriasis guide](#).

There is no cure for psoriasis but the good news is that great strides have been made in psoriasis treatment over the last 20 years and there are more effective treatments for psoriasis today than ever before.<sup>2</sup>

There are three main groups of treatment and a doctor will decide which to choose based on different factors such as the severity of the psoriasis.<sup>5</sup>

### Topical treatments

applied to skin, these are available via a pharmacy ('over the counter') or prescribed by a doctor



**Creams,  
ointment  
and gels**

### Phototherapy

natural ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun and controlled delivery or artificial UV light are administered by a doctor



**UV therapy**

### Systemic treatment

prescribed by a doctor, commonly taken as a tablet or given in hospital via drip or injected at home



**Orals**



**Injectables**

- Biologics
- Other

## Different types of relationships

Psoriasis affects more than just those living with the condition; there are many different relationships that may be affected:

- Romantic partners<sup>6</sup>
- Family<sup>7</sup>
- Friends<sup>7</sup>
- Colleagues<sup>8</sup>
- Healthcare Professionals

This guide will look at each of these relationships from both perspectives.



## Romantic partners<sup>6</sup>

### If you have psoriasis

#### Do things in your own time

New relationships can be exciting, but also stressful at times. Stress can trigger flare-ups, so try to relax as much as you can and take things at a pace you are comfortable with. While honesty is always the best policy, it is completely up to you how and when you open up about your condition, and how much detail you want to share.

#### Communication is key

Your partner cannot read your mind and you may need to explain some things about psoriasis and its effects that seem obvious to you. Remember, they may not have any knowledge of psoriasis prior to being with you.

Explaining how you feel, and why, will help your partner to support you.

### If you love someone who has psoriasis

#### Don't force the psoriasis conversation

After finding out your partner has psoriasis, you might have some questions. Be patient and considerate in the way you ask and talk about psoriasis, and never push for answers. Your partner will open up in his or her own time, and there are plenty of resources available to educate yourself properly in preparation for those conversations.

#### Don't take it personally

Your loved one may sometimes want to avoid sex, touch and intimacy. This is likely to be a result of how they feel about themselves rather than you, although it can be very hard when it feels like a loved one is withdrawing from you.

Do not be afraid to talk about your emotions. Your feelings are important too.

### **If you have psoriasis**

#### **Be open about your insecurities and internal battles**

Open the conversation with how you feel about yourself, both physically and mentally. You are likely to be pleasantly surprised by how differently others see you, compared to how you see yourself.

Open and honest conversations provide the opportunity for compliments and a sometimes much needed confidence boost!

#### **Find a way to boost your confidence**

Find a support group, work on a hobby or something you enjoy – do something that makes you feel good about yourself.

Learn how to accept compliments and enjoy the nice things people say about you. Try to see yourself through their eyes!

#### **Find a way to make sex work for you**

If you are in the middle of a flare-up, sex is probably the last thing on your mind. Talk to your partner and find other ways of being intimate, like watching a film or cooking a romantic dinner together.

If you want to be intimate, do whatever you need to do to make yourself feel comfortable. Whether that is turning the lights off, keeping your clothes on or carefully selecting the colour of your bedsheets.

Keep communication open with your partner. Explain why you want to do things the way you do, and allow them to ask questions.

### **If you love someone who has psoriasis**

#### **Acknowledge your loved one's insecurities, and try your best to understand them**

Even though you may think your partner is attractive, unfortunately they may not always see themselves that way – especially if they are living with a chronic condition like psoriasis.

Taking the time to listen to your partner's insecurities, and trying to understand the reasons behind this, will help you work together to overcome them.

#### **A compliment can go a long way**

Encourage your partner to join a support group, or work on a hobby to increase their self-esteem.

People living with psoriasis often suffer from low confidence and self-esteem. Tell your partner that you find them attractive, and do it often!

#### **Be kind, be patient**

If your partner seems to be avoiding physical intimacy or behaving strangely in the bedroom, communicate with them in a loving way to get to the source of the problem.

Acknowledge the insecurities behind this behaviour, be patient and work through them together – you never know how much stronger your relationship could grow.



## Family<sup>7</sup>

### If you have psoriasis

#### Educate your family

Some people have a family history of psoriasis, but for others, they may be the only person in their family with the condition.

Talk to your family about psoriasis and how it affects you, encouraging them to learn more. Point them in the direction of the guides in this series if you find that easier than talking.

#### Remember that your family cannot read your mind

While families often know us really well, they may need some help understanding how psoriasis affects you personally, and what kind of support you might like.

Don't be shy to explain things to them and ask for help!

#### Don't hide your feelings

Sometimes it can feel easier to hide difficult feelings and pretend everything is OK, even when it is not. While it is completely up to you to decide how much you share about psoriasis and how it makes you feel, it is a good idea to share with a trusted family member or friend if you are feeling particularly sad, anxious or frustrated.

### If your relative has psoriasis

#### Learn about psoriasis

One of the most important things you can do is to learn about psoriasis and its effects. Even if you already know a little about psoriasis, remember that every person experiences it differently, so it is important to ask your loved one about how it affects them personally.

#### Understand what your loved one wants and needs

Ask them about specific ways you can help them. There are many different things you can do to help someone living with a condition like psoriasis, but everyone has different needs and it is important to ask how you can help and support.

#### Don't dismiss their feelings

It can be tempting to try and 'cheer up' someone who is feeling depressed or anxious about their psoriasis. Rather than helping, this can have the opposite effect!

Help your relative feel safe talking about how their psoriasis affects them. While some people might want to hear advice on things they can do to feel better, remember that others will just want to express their feelings without fear of judgement. Remember that it is a good idea to encourage your loved one to talk about these feelings with their doctor as well, in case they need additional help.

### **If you have psoriasis**

#### **Don't be afraid to ask for help**

There may be times where you need help from those around you. This might be for all sorts of reasons – for example, a flare-up may leave you feeling too tired to do things around the home for a while. Alternatively, perhaps you need support from your doctor. Whatever it is, share it with someone you trust. Ask for the help you need.

### **If your relative has psoriasis**

#### **Support at home**

Psoriasis can take a toll on the body and there may be times where your loved one needs extra support. Try to be receptive if they ask for help and support them in making changes that might be needed to make life a little easier. This could be as simple as helping out with household chores during a flare-up.



## **Friends<sup>7</sup>**

### **If you have psoriasis**

#### **Educate your friends**

Your friends may not know much about psoriasis, but it is likely that they will want to learn more.

If you feel comfortable, you can tell them about the condition and its impact, or you can simply point them in the direction of this leaflet and others in the series. It's up to you to decide how much you choose to share and when.

### **If your friend has psoriasis**

#### **Learn about psoriasis**

Psoriasis might have a big impact on your friend's life, but you may not know much about the condition. Commit to learning more. Your friend may be open to telling you about the condition or you could do your own research. Ask your friend what they would prefer. They will be happy to hear you care!

#### **Communication is key**

As with other relationships, being open with your friends is important. It's a good idea to explain the impact of psoriasis on your life and how it may affect your relationships with others. This will help your friends understand you better and support you during difficult times.

#### **Don't underestimate the effects of psoriasis**

Psoriasis affects everyone differently but for some the impact can be very significant, on both their physical and mental health. Try to remember that it's not 'just' a skin condition, the effects can go much deeper and affect peoples' lives in many different ways.

### If your friend has psoriasis

#### Try to be flexible with plans

There may times when your friend avoids socialising or cancels plans. This can be frustrating, but it might be due to a psoriasis flare-up, which can leave them feeling very uncomfortable and tired, or they may even feel embarrassed about their skin.

Ask them if there's anything you can do to help, or suggest an alternative plan which may work better for them if they are feeling unwell or embarrassed.

#### Be patient and understanding

Patience and understanding is one of the biggest gifts you can offer. While you might not know all the details of their condition and its treatment, simply explaining that you will try your best to understand can be important to someone living with a condition like psoriasis.

#### Be a positive influence

Your friend may struggle to feel positive sometimes, particularly during a flare-up. During hard times, try to show them how much you care and ask if there's anything you can do to help them feel better. Even small gestures can help someone feel a little more positive!



**Colleagues<sup>8</sup>**

### If you have psoriasis

#### Be open about your condition and your needs

While you're not legally obliged to tell anyone at work about your condition, you might prefer to share some information with your manager or human resources team if you feel it could affect your work at some point.

You may also find that sharing some details can help your colleagues understand your needs and possibly make adjustments to make life at work a little easier.

### If you work with someone who has psoriasis

#### Listen and understand

Your colleague may find it hard to open up about psoriasis. Psoriasis affects people differently so try to understand how your colleague is affected and if there is anything you can do to support them at work.



### **If you have psoriasis**

#### **Prioritise self-care**

Stress can make psoriasis worse for some, so it's important to take self-care seriously and plan ways you can switch off and relax during stressful work periods. 'Self-care' means different things to different people, but it can include meditation, reading a book, listening to podcasts or taking a walk in nature. See what works best for you.

### **If you work with someone who has psoriasis**

#### **Encourage good work-life balance**

Over-working can cause stress, which in turn, can make psoriasis worse. Try to support your colleague in finding a work-life balance that works for them. This may include encouraging them to speak to their manager or human resources team about working arrangements.

### **If you work with someone who has psoriasis**

#### **Educate yourself**

Take the time to learn more about psoriasis and how it can affect someone's day-to-day life as well as their work. Your colleague may want to tell you more about psoriasis, or you can learn more by reading the guides in this series.

#### **Support your colleague and be as flexible as possible when it comes to medical appointments, or needing to work from home during flare-ups**

There may be times when your colleague isn't able to perform as well at work due to a psoriasis flare-up, or they may need time working from home or have time off for medical appointments. This may be hard if you're expected to take on extra work, so do discuss this with your manager if you're worried. Try to support your colleague during these times as they can be physically and emotionally draining. Remember, with support and encouragement, your colleague's flare-up may pass quicker than it would if they work in a highly stressful environment – and the earlier it calms down, the sooner they can be back to work.



## Healthcare Professionals

### If you have psoriasis<sup>9</sup>

#### Be clear about your goals

Don't be afraid to explain to your doctor exactly what support you need and what you're hoping for from treatment. Discuss what's possible and what options are available to you. It can help to make notes on this before your appointment, so you have something to refer to.

### If you treat people who have psoriasis

#### Take the time to listen

It can take time for someone to feel comfortable to open up about the impact of psoriasis. They may shy away from admitting to difficult feelings.

Allow time in a consultation to discuss the impact of the condition, and where extra support might be needed. Talking about the emotional and psychological impact of psoriasis can be hard for some people.

If you suspect the condition is causing problems for your patient, probe deeper and don't take 'I'm fine' at face value.

### If you have psoriasis

#### Find a doctor you can be honest with

It's important you feel able to honestly share your experience of psoriasis with your doctor. Many different factors can affect how comfortable you feel discussing your care – maybe your current doctor doesn't specialise in psoriasis treatment, or maybe you're simply struggling to open up to them – but one thing is clear, if you don't feel able to speak honestly with your current doctor you should consider finding someone else. They won't be offended.

**Finding the right doctor for you is critical with life-long conditions like psoriasis. You're going to be spending a lot of time with them, so it's important you feel supported and connected if you're, not only going to learn to live with your condition, but live well.**

**Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. Remember, whether you have psoriasis, love or work with someone who does, the key to a healthy relationship is honest and open communication.**

## Notes

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## References

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