



**Beyond**  
Expectations

# Mental Health and Psoriasis

janssen  Immunology

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES OF 



## Psoriasis gets in your head

Psoriasis can feel like a battle – one that has a deep impact on the people who suffer from it, and those who love them; but the true bearing of the condition goes beyond the physical symptoms. The condition's effects on your mental health can be the most difficult challenge to overcome.<sup>1</sup>

If you have psoriasis, studies show there is a good chance you might also suffer from stress, depression and anxiety. The problem is that, if these symptoms go unrecognised and untreated, they can prevent you from effectively managing your psoriasis, which means your psoriasis gets worse, and so do your mental health problems.<sup>1</sup>

This guide aims to give practical advice on how to manage your mental health if you, or a loved one, has psoriasis.

**If you are having suicidal thoughts, please immediately contact your local healthcare provider or visit an emergency room, and let a friend or family member know.**



## Impact in numbers

- Approximately **50%** of psoriasis patients report being rejected and stigmatised as a result of their condition<sup>2</sup>
- Approximately **one third** of people with psoriasis have depression and anxiety<sup>6</sup>
- **37%** of people felt their relationships had deteriorated as a result of their psoriasis<sup>3</sup>
- Over **37%** of psoriasis patients have experienced suicidal thoughts<sup>4</sup>
- Over **50%** of patients struggle to sleep<sup>5</sup>
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health disorders – depression and anxiety in particular – are the main cause of lost productivity for the general population. The estimated global cost is **\$1 trillion** annually<sup>7</sup>
- People with psoriasis have higher rates of environmental risk factors, including **smoking, alcohol use, obesity and sedentary lifestyles**<sup>8</sup>



## Psoriasis is personal

The connection between chronic illnesses and mental health conditions is well documented,<sup>1</sup> but even though these challenges are common in illnesses like psoriasis, they do vary from person to person, and they don't always correlate with psoriasis severity. Understandably, one person may find a small patch of psoriasis on their face or genitals to be far more upsetting than someone else who may find large plaques on their back.<sup>9</sup> Remember, no matter how severe your psoriasis, or where it is on your body, it's just as important to manage your mental health, and seek help when you need it, as it is to manage your treatment. Your psoriasis, and how it impacts you both physically and mentally, is completely unique and no one can tell you how it should make you feel.



## How to manage your mental health

### 1 Manage your stress

In a number of studies from different countries, obesity and weight gain have been identified as significant risk factors for psoriasis, which is likely to add to your stress levels.<sup>9</sup> It will come as no surprise that in cases such as these exercise is the best way to manage these risk factors, as it not only helps to keep your weight in check, but boosts your mood and lowers inflammation, which can help ease your symptoms.<sup>10</sup>

If finding the time and motivation to get to the gym or take a walk is too difficult to manage at the moment, then meditation/mindfulness, spending time doing something you enjoy, or talking openly with your friends and family, can all help decrease your stress.<sup>8</sup>

### 2 Be honest

People with psoriasis who get social support – be it from friends, family, co-workers, or even from fellow patients on a forum – feel better day-to-day, and are less likely to have depression.<sup>8</sup> Be honest and tell the people you trust how psoriasis is affecting you emotionally. Read our [Psoriasis and Relationships guide](#) for more advice on this.

### 3 Take it one day at a time

When you're feeling low, you might find it easier to deal with the mental health implications of your psoriasis if you stop worrying about the future and the hurdles you might face. Try to focus on the moment rather than the bigger picture.<sup>11</sup>

### 4 Refresh your knowledge

You might know a lot about psoriasis already, but whether you're an immunology expert or someone who's just found out about psoriasis, keep yourself educated with the latest news and what's on the horizon. The more you know, the better you'll be able to explain if someone asks about your psoriasis, but you'll also feel more hopeful knowing that research is being done and there are new treatment options appearing. Consider getting involved with such discussions and joining a support group.<sup>9</sup>

### 5 Get your psoriasis under control

It stands to reason that the best way to improve any stress, depression or anxiety brought on by psoriasis, is to get your psoriasis under control. If the condition improves, then your depression may also improve, so take your treatment as your doctor or dermatologist has prescribed and go back to them if you aren't getting the results you want.<sup>8</sup>

## 6 Get some sun

Being outside, even on a cloudy day, gives you exposure to light, and light helps reset your biological clocks, which helps you sleep better. Better quality sleep can help improve your mental health and light therapy is also used to treat both mood disorders and psoriasis.<sup>8</sup> Do be careful though, as over-exposure to sunlight can cause cancer or even worsen your condition, so it is important to wear sunscreen and consult your doctor on the appropriate amount of time to spend in direct sunlight.<sup>9</sup>

## 7 Speak to people who understand

Visiting forums or patient organisation websites where you can speak to others with psoriasis, and hear from people who have struggled in the same way that you have, can help you feel less alone. These new friends may also be able to provide additional emotional support, combined with useful practical advice.

In Europe, a good starting point is the EUOPSO website <https://www.euro-psy.org/>. EUOPSO is a patient advocacy group of which all European county-level groups are a member. You can use the website to find local groups and lots of valuable tools and information on how to manage the condition.

## 8 Seek professional help

Have you tried everything, but still feel unhappy? It's important to know when you need professional help, and to get it if you do. If your low mood has lasted more than two weeks, if you're struggling to handle your daily life, shutting yourself away from friends and family, or you're finding it impossible to enjoy the activities you used to love, it's time to visit a professional.<sup>12</sup>

One option your doctor, dermatologist or mental health professional might suggest is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Recent studies in psoriasis patients have shown significant improvements in mental health status and the clinical severity of their psoriasis in patients who have begun CBT, so it could be a good option to explore.<sup>13</sup>

If you're struggling to find the motivation to get the help you need, then speak to a friend or family member so they can support and encourage you, either in booking an appointment for you, driving you there, or just reassuring you that asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it's a sign of strength.

**Treating depression when you have psoriasis: Some treatments for mental illnesses may cause psoriasis symptoms to flare so it is important to discuss your condition with your healthcare provider who will be able to provide guidance.**



## On the road to recovery

A life-long condition like psoriasis can make you feel like you're not in control. People might tell you to "learn to live with it" or to settle for passable treatment and some clearance. However it is important not to settle for sub-optimal treatment or imperfect care.

Psoriasis is now the world's most effectively treated immune-mediated disease, with improvements possible in 90% of patients.<sup>14</sup> The truth is that good disease management shouldn't be about luck. Doctors are increasingly looking to treat the whole person, not just their skin, which means that everyone should aim to live a life where psoriasis has no impact on your physical or mental health.



**Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. Your mental health is as important as your physical health and, with the right support and treatment, it can be improved and managed. Don't give up and remember to ask for help if you need it.**

## Notes

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