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Cleveland Clinic



Genital Psoriasis

Genital psoriasis is a condition that affects the skin on and around your genitals. It causes patches of painful, smooth or flaky, discolored and itchy skin. Genital psoriasis can look similar to a sexually transmitted infection, but it's not contagious. Treatment is available to relieve your symptoms, but there's no cure for psoriasis.

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Overview

What is genital psoriasis?

Genital psoriasis is a skin condition that affects the skin on or around your genitals. It's a type of [psoriasis](#). An overactive immune system causes patches of painful, smooth or flaky, discolored and itchy skin. Symptoms of genital psoriasis differ from psoriasis on other parts of

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Other names for genital psoriasis are:

- Vulvar psoriasis.
- Vaginal psoriasis.
- Penile psoriasis.

Who does genital psoriasis affect and how common is it?

Genital psoriasis affects people diagnosed with psoriasis. This includes children, men and people assigned male at birth ([AMAB](#)), and women and people assigned female at birth ([AFAB](#)).

Psoriasis affects more than 3% of the United States population. More than half of all people diagnosed with psoriasis experience symptoms on or around their genitals at least once during their lifetime

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What are the types of psoriasis that affect the genitals?

Several different types of psoriasis can affect your genital region. The most common types of psoriasis include:

- [Plaque psoriasis](#).
- [Inverse psoriasis](#).
- Pustular psoriasis.
- [Guttate psoriasis](#).

What's the difference between genital psoriasis and eczema?

Psoriasis and eczema are both skin conditions that can affect the skin on your genitals. The main differences between psoriasis and eczema on the genitals include:

- **Psoriasis:** Smooth (sometimes scaly or flaky), moist and discolored patches of skin.
- [Eczema](#): A dry, bumpy, discolored and itchy rash.

While psoriasis can be itchy, eczema is usually itchier than psoriasis.

Symptoms and Causes

What are the symptoms of genital psoriasis?

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- A thin patch of skin.
- Skin discoloration that's usually pink to red to purple or dark brown.
- Smooth, shiny patches of skin or a patch of skin with silvery scales.
- Cracked skin.
- Itchy skin.
- Pain or discomfort.
- Skin is either dry or moist depending on the location on your genitals.

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A main symptom of psoriasis is scaly or flaky skin caused by a buildup of dead skin cells. Because of the location of genital psoriasis, scales aren't always present because of friction, where the area of affected skin rubs against skin or clothing. This prevents a buildup of scales and instead, creates a smooth surface.

Where on my body will I have symptoms of

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As the name implies, genital psoriasis affects the genital region of your body, including:

- The skin above your genitals (pubis).
- Vulva.
- Penis or scrotum.

Can genital psoriasis cause blisters?

A type of psoriasis, called pustular psoriasis, can cause [blisters](#). This type of psoriasis can affect your genital or groin area and cause painful, pus-filled blisters on your skin. Pustular psoriasis isn't contagious, but it can look similar to other sexually transmitted infections that affect your genitals. If you experience symptoms of pustular psoriasis, visit a healthcare provider.

What causes genital psoriasis?

Genital psoriasis is an [autoimmune condition](#) caused by an overactive [immune system](#). Your immune system tells your healthy skin cells to replicate too soon, which causes inflammation and a buildup of dead skin cells on the surface of your skin. The exact reason why your immune system overreacts is unknown, but there might be a genetic factor that leads to a psoriasis diagnosis.

What triggers genital psoriasis?

Contact with irritants and allergens can trigger symptoms of psoriasis on your skin. Triggers that can cause a flare-up of genital psoriasis include:

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- Friction from tight-fitting clothes or sexual intercourse.

Is genital psoriasis contagious?

No. Genital psoriasis isn't contagious. It doesn't spread through physical contact with another person who has psoriasis.

Genital psoriasis isn't a [sexually transmitted infection](#). While friction from sexual contact can irritate your skin and cause a flare of symptoms, the condition doesn't spread to your sexual partners.

Diagnosis and Tests

How is genital psoriasis diagnosed?

A healthcare provider will diagnose genital psoriasis after a physical exam to review your symptoms. The appearance of symptoms on your skin usually leads to a diagnosis. Your provider might offer a [skin biopsy](#) if your symptoms appear similar to other conditions that affect the skin on and around your genitals.

You may choose to visit a [dermatologist](#) to diagnose and treat genital psoriasis.

Management and Treatment

How do you get rid of genital psoriasis?

Treatment for genital psoriasis is different from treating psoriasis on

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there. Your healthcare provider might recommend one of the following treatments:

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- [Corticosteroid](#) cream.
- [Coal tar](#) cream.
- [Calcipotriene](#) cream.
- [Pimecrolimus](#) cream.
- [Tacrolimus](#) ointment.
- Topinarof cream.
- Roflumilast cream.
- [Cyclosporine](#), [methotrexate](#) or a biologic for severe cases.

Treatment for genital psoriasis is unique to everyone. The treatment that works for you might not work for someone else with similar symptoms.

Each topical medication has specific instructions for use and possible

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medication. They'll discuss the side effects and review any medications you currently take to avoid drug interactions.

How soon after treatment will I feel better?

A flare-up of genital psoriasis symptoms can last for a couple of weeks to a few months. Psoriasis is a lifelong condition that can last indefinitely. The timeline for when it'll go away depends on the type of treatment you and your provider choose. Medicated treatments help your symptoms go away sooner. Avoiding irritants and keeping your skin clean helps speed up your skin's healing process.



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Prevention

How can I prevent genital psoriasis?

You can't prevent psoriasis, but you can reduce your risk of developing a flare-up of genital psoriasis symptoms by:

- Using a mild, fragrance-free soap or cleanser to clean your skin daily.

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- Using soft toilet paper to clean your genital area after you make a bowel movement.
- Wearing loose-fitting clothing and avoid wearing tight-fitting underwear.

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What can I expect if I have genital psoriasis?

The genital region is a common place to have symptoms of psoriasis. Treatment is available to help you manage your symptoms. Psoriasis flares take several days to weeks to go away with treatment, but can come back after treatment, as it's a chronic condition.

Some people who have a psoriasis diagnosis feel uncomfortable about how their symptoms affect their appearance or confidence level,

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Can I have sex with genital psoriasis?

Yes, you can have sex with genital psoriasis. If you choose to participate in sexual activities while you have a flare-up of genital psoriasis symptoms, use the following tips:

- **Talk to your partner:** The appearance of genital psoriasis can look similar to sexually transmitted infections. Discuss your diagnosis with your partner to let them know that the condition isn't contagious. If you're feeling pain or discomfort during sex, speak up and keep the line of communication open.
- **Avoid friction:** Use lubrication or lubricated condoms to prevent friction or rubbing against your affected skin. "Cooling" lubricants are better for your skin rather than "warming" products that can cause irritation.
- **Clean your skin:** After sex, be sure to wash your skin with water and a gentle soap or cleanser.

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When should I see my healthcare provider?

Visit your healthcare provider or your dermatologist if:

- Your symptoms get worse.
- You have severe pain, itching or discomfort.
- It hurts to use the toilet or have sex.

What questions should I ask my doctor?

- Can I have sex with genital psoriasis?
- How often should I apply topical medications?
- Are there side effects to the medications?
- What type of moisturizer do you recommend?

A note from Cleveland Clinic

Your genital area is a common location for a psoriasis flare up. While you may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about where symptoms of psoriasis are, it's important to discuss your symptoms with your healthcare provider. Treatment is available to help you manage your symptoms and reduce the discomfort you might feel. Genital psoriasis isn't contagious, so you can still be intimate. But use caution to avoid irritating your skin during sex.

