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* [Connect With Us: Social Media](http://kidshealth.org/parent/kh_misc/socialmedia.html)
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Psoriasis can be worrying, especially when you see your child struggle with itching or discomfort.

For most kids, psoriasis is limited to just a few patches that usually respond well to treatment. Cases that are more serious cases might require more aggressive treatment.

But the good news is that there are many options. If one treatment doesn't work, another probably will.

**About Psoriasis**

Psoriasis (suh-**rye**-uh-sus) is a non-contagious disease that causes skin cells to build up on the surface of the skin, forming itchy red patches (plaques) and thick scales. It can appear anywhere on the body but is most commonly found on the scalp, knees, elbows, and torso.

Psoriasis is a long-lasting (chronic) condition that can get better or worse seemingly at random. It may go away completely before suddenly reappearing.

For many kids, psoriasis is just a minor inconvenience; for others, though, it can be quite serious. Psoriasis can lead kids to feel self-conscious about their appearance. Sometimes that affects their emotions, and some kids may develop low self-esteem and even depression as a result.

Right now, there's no cure for psoriasis, but a number of good options are available to treat the symptoms. Lifestyle changes, such as maintaining a healthy diet and weight, also can help ease the symptoms.

**Causes**

Doctors aren't sure why people get psoriasis, but they do know how the disease works. White blood cells known as T lymphocytes or T cells are part of the [immune system](http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/body_basics/immune.html). They travel through the bloodstream fighting off bacteria, viruses, and other things that cause illnesses. When someone has psoriasis, however, T cells attack healthy skin as if they were trying to fight an infection or heal a wound.

Skin cells, which are made deep in the skin, normally take about a month to rise to the surface, where they die and are sloughed off. When psoriasis triggers T cells to attack healthy skin, the immune system responds by sending more blood to the area and making more skin cells and more white blood cells. This forces skin cells to rise to the surface in a few days instead of a month. The dead skin and white blood cells can't be shed quickly enough, and they build up on the surface of the skin as thick, red patches. As the skin cells die, they form silvery scales that eventually flake off.

Psoriasis isn't contagious. Some people inherit the genes that make them susceptible to having it. About 40% of people with psoriasis have a family member who also has the disease.

Risk factors that can increase the chances of psoriasis outbreaks include:

* **Infections.** Strep throat, colds, and other infectious diseases trigger the body's immune system to respond, making a psoriasis outbreak more likely.
* **Obesity.** The plaques that are produced by many kinds of psoriasis often develop in folds of skin.
* **Certain medicines.** Lithium, beta-blockers for high blood pressure, and drugs used to prevent malaria have been shown to increase the risk of psoriasis.
* **Stress.** High stress levels can have an effect on the body's immune system and can make psoriasis symptoms worse.
* **Skin irritations.** Cuts, scratches, sunburns, rashes, and other irritations that affect the skin can make a psoriasis outbreak more likely.
* **Cold weather.** In the winter, kids generally spend more time indoors and get less sun. A moderate amount of direct sunlight can help to improve psoriasis.

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