

MANAGING YOUR PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS

What Is Psoriatic Arthritis?

Psoriatic arthritis is a type of arthritis affecting people with the serious skin condition psoriasis. It causes inflammation of certain joints and a rash. Areas most often affected are fingers, neck, and lower back. Less often, eyes, nails, and heart are inflamed. The rash usually starts before the joint pain, but some people aren't aware of the rash until after pain develops. Psoriasis may affect the nails, scalp, umbilicus (belly button), and genital area. Psoriatic arthritis occurs most often between the ages of 30 and 50 years, equally in men and women.

What Causes Psoriatic Arthritis?

The cause isn't known, but certain hereditary and environmental factors may increase the risk of getting psoriatic arthritis. The condition can run in families but isn't infectious and can't be caught from others.

What Are the Symptoms of Psoriatic Arthritis?

Symptoms are pain, swelling, and warmth of certain joints plus a rash. Psoriatic arthritis of the fingers can make it hard to write, open jars, and lift and carry items. An affected back can cause problems bending or standing. Psoriatic arthritis of the neck may make it hard to move the head. The rash from psoriasis can cause embarrassment in social situations.

How Is Psoriatic Arthritis Diagnosed?

For diagnosis, the health care provider uses a medical history; examines the joints, skin, and nails; and orders laboratory tests. X-rays of the joints, neck, and lower back may also be done.

Laboratory tests may include the erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR), which measures inflammation, and a complete blood cell count (CBC).

How Is Psoriatic Arthritis Treated?

No cure exists. However, with earlier detection, better medicines, and good treatment most people can lead a full life. The best way to manage the illness is to use a combination of medicines, physical therapy, exercise, and education. Medications such as nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) help reduce inflammation causing pain and swelling. If these medicines don't work well, disease-modifying drugs may slow down the disease process. These drugs tend to have serious side effects and need close watching. A dermatologist (skin health care provider) may prescribe medicines for psoriasis.

Learning about arthritis is critical because it's a lifelong disease. Exercise is important for proper joint movement and muscle strength. Alternating periods of rest and activity helps manage fatigue.

DOs and DON'Ts in Psoriatic Arthritis

- ✓ **DO** take your medicines as prescribed.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have side effects from the drugs or if the drugs don't help joint pain, stiffness, or swelling or the psoriasis.
- ✓ **DO** ask your health care provider what over-the-counter pain drugs and skin products you may use with the prescription medicines.
- ✓ **DO** exercise, to help maintain joint range of motion and muscle strength.

- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you need a referral to a physical or occupational therapist for exercise or joint protection.
- ⊗ **DON'T** wait and see if a drug's side effect will go away. Call your health care provider.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give up. If one drug doesn't help, work with your health care provider until you find one that does.
- ⊗ **DON'T** follow a specific diet without the ok of your health care provider.
- ⊗ **DON'T** continue an exercise program that causes pain. Pain usually means that the exercise must be modified for you.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- The Arthritis Foundation: Tel: (800) 283-7800; or (503) 297-1545; Website:
<http://www.arthritis.org>

- The American College of Rheumatology: Tel: 4043-644-3777; Website:
<http://www.vascularweb.com>

Copyright © 2021 by Elsevier, Inc.