

# Healthy Habits

August 2006

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

## August is National Psoriasis Month

Psoriasis [pronounced sore-EYE-ah-sis] is a skin disease that has been diagnosed in 4.5 million adults in the United States. Although it is not contagious, it often occurs in families. To date, there is no cure.

### Understanding psoriasis

Your skin is much more than just a body covering, it is an important and complex organ. Normally functioning skin reproduces every 28 to 30 days to replace older or dying skin cells. With psoriasis, the immune system triggers the skin to reproduce every 3 to 4 days causing skin to build up and form raised scaly lesions. The skin also may become red from the increased blood supply to the rapidly dividing cells, and silvery white scale, composed of dead skin cells, is evident.

### Onset of psoriasis

Ordinarily, the first outbreak of psoriasis occurs between the ages of 15 and 35, but it can appear at any age. Thirty percent of those who get psoriasis are less than 20 years old when the disease first surfaces. Though psoriasis is believed to be an immune-mediated disease, both heredity and environmental factors also play a part in the disease. About 25 percent of young people report the onset of their psoriasis followed an infection, particularly strep throat. One-third to one-half of all young people with psoriasis may experience a flare up two to six weeks after an earache, strep throat, bronchitis, tonsillitis or a respiratory infection.

Stress is thought to play a role in psoriasis, but stress alone is not a cause. Some studies have linked stress to psoriasis outbreaks and more severe progression of the disease, but other studies have found no connection between stress and psoriasis.

Areas of the skin that have been injured or trauma-



Don't let psoriasis stop you from having a healthy lifestyle.  
Learn more at [www.psoriasis.org](http://www.psoriasis.org)

tized are sometimes the sites of psoriasis; this is called the "Koebner phenomenon." However, not everyone with psoriasis develops it at the site of an injury.

### Living with Psoriasis

No special blood tests or diagnostic tools exist to diagnose psoriasis. The physician or other health-care provider usually examines the affected skin to make a diagnosis. Less often, the physician examines a piece of skin (biopsy) under the microscope. Even so, once diagnosed, there is no cure for psoriasis but there are many effective psoriasis treatments. Some work by slowing skin cell reproduction. Others work to remove scale. Some may simply help soothe itchy or uncomfortable skin. All prescription psoriasis medications can be effective in improving lesions, but understand, not all people with psoriasis react the same way to different medications. It may require experimentation to see which treatments, or combination of treatments, work best. If you suspect that you or a family members has psoriasis, it is important to contact your healthcare provider. Together you can work to identify possible causes or triggers and find the most effective treatment for you.

*The material contained in Healthy Habits is not intended to be medical advice on any particular matter. Readers should seek appropriate professional advice before acting on the basis of any information contained in this publication. This information is provided courtesy of Optima Health.*