

What is it?



Psoriatic arthritis (PsA) is a chronic (long-term) condition that can affect both the joints and the skin. It is a type of inflammatory arthritis. The body's immune system becomes confused and starts to attack the joints and the skin, causing inflammation.

The word inflammation comes from the Latin word *inflammare* which means to light on fire. In people with PsA, inflammation causes the joints to become warm, swollen, and painful. The joints can feel like they're "on fire." Unfortunately, we don't yet know why the immune system does this or what triggers it.

Now is probably the best time in history to get PsA. The approach to treatment has changed and the medicines available today are much more effective than in the past.



PsA is a fire in your joints and skin caused by inflammation.

Putting out the fire early prevents damage to your body.

Imagine you were sitting in your living room and you noticed a fire on the stove. You wouldn't say "let's wait a little bit" until the fire spreads to the ceiling before trying to put it out. You would want to call the fire department and grab the fire extinguisher.

You can think of PsA like a fire in your joints and skin. You want to put out the fire as quickly as possible so it doesn't permanently damage your body and before it spreads to other parts of the body.

What is it going to do to me?



PsA can affect people in different ways. The most common way is for PsA to "pick on" a few joints, like the knee, a wrist or a finger. Over time, more joints can become affected.

In some people, joints at the ends of the fingers or toes may become affected. Fingers or toes can actually swell up like a sausage. Eventually, PsA can affect other parts of the body, such as tendons at the backs of the heels, under the bottoms of the feet, around the knee, on the outside of the hips, or between the ribs. Once the damage from PsA is done it cannot be reversed. PsA can eventually destroy the joints affected if it is not adequately controlled.

The immune system also attacks the skin in people with PsA (this is called psoriasis). This causes the skin to become red (inflamed). Sometimes the skin is covered by a silvery-white scale. Psoriasis can hide on the scalp or it can even affect the fingernails and toenails.

One thing to remember about PsA and other types of inflammatory arthritis is that chronic (long-term) inflammation is not good for the body. Chronic swelling in a joint can cause permanent damage. Having PsA or other types of inflammatory arthritis is linked to heart disease. That means people with PsA have a higher chance of developing heart disease than people without PsA.

Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about PsA and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

What can I do about it?



The first thing you should do is make sure your PsA is treated. If you have PsA or think you may have PsA, your family doctor should refer you to a rheumatologist. A rheumatologist is a specialist doctor who is an expert in treating arthritis. This type of doctor is in the best position to help you manage your condition. It can also be a good idea to consult a dermatologist to treat your skin if your psoriasis is severe.

The goal of treatment is to protect the joints before PsA causes permanent damage. Once the damage from PsA is done it cannot be reversed with any kind of treatment.

It is important to treat PsA with medications that control the symptoms **and** prevent long-term damage. These medications fall into two categories:

1. **Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs)**
2. **Biologics**

If you've got PsA you **should** be taking DMARDs and/or biologics. Only one DMARD, (methotrexate), and biologics control inflammation in both the joints and the skin.

Make sure you do everything you can to reduce your risk of heart disease. Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol at healthy levels. If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar under control. If you are a smoker, quitting can improve your condition. It can also be one of the best things you can do for your overall health. Here are some other recommendations on what you should do:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **See your rheumatologist regularly**
- **Get your blood tests regularly as suggested by your rheumatologist**
- **Reduce your risk of heart disease**