Psoriasis Australia
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Psoriasis + MENTAL HEALTH

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A GUIDE FOR LIVING WITH PSORIATIC DISEASE IN AUSTRALIA

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ucb Inspired by patients. Driven by science.

Psoriasis Australia is the leading Australian not-for-profit patient organisation at the forefront of raising awareness and understanding of Psoriatic Disease (Psoriasis – PSO and Psoriatic Arthritis – PSA) with the medical profession and wider Australian public.

About Psoriasis Australia

Psoriasis Australia aims to:

- Educate patients, families and the general community about psoriatic disease and its treatments
- Provide support patients and their families
- Distribute new information and research results
- Encourage research into new treatments and potential cures.

To support these aims, Psoriasis Australia fundraises at the local level and maintains contact with government departments, health authorities, pharmaceutical companies and psoriasis support groups worldwide.

We welcome your involvement with Psoriasis Australia and encourage you to make contact for further information.

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This guide is for anyone in Australia living with psoriasis who wants to better understand how the condition can affect mental health — and how to find balance and wellbeing.

It offers:

- Easy-to-read information about psoriasis and emotional health
- Real-life stories from Australians living with psoriasis
- Tips and exercises to manage stress, anxiety, and low mood
- Details about support and care available through Australia's health system

Everything here is based on the latest scientific research and trusted mental health advice from experts like Beyond Blue, the World Health Organization, and leading dermatology journals

WHAT IS PSORIASIS?

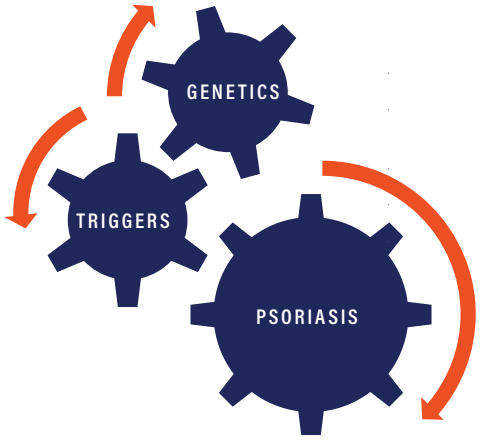
Psoriasis is a common autoimmune condition, with as many as one in 1.6 million Australians living with the condition.

The most common form of psoriasis causes raised, inflamed, scaly, red skin lesions, known as plaques. It is non-contagious, so it cannot be caught from someone else.

Psoriasis is more than skin deep. It affects how a person feels, both physically and emotionally.

WHAT CAUSES PSORIASIS?

Psoriasis is an autoimmune disease – it is caused by overactivity of the immune system in the skin.



Immune cells accumulate and produce a range of chemicals, which act as if they are fighting infection or healing a wound. Skins cells multiply at an abnormally fast rate, forming psoriasis plaques.

Up to half of people with psoriasis have a family history of the condition, and inherited factors are known to be important.[2] However, even if a person is genetically predisposed to the condition, psoriasis may not appear. A trigger is required for it to develop.

These triggers or risk factors include:

- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Infections
- Physical trauma
- Injury to site
- Certain medications
- Emotional stress

Plaque psoriasis lesions are usually:

- Dry
- Raised slightly above the skin
- Red
- Covered with silvery scales

They may also be:

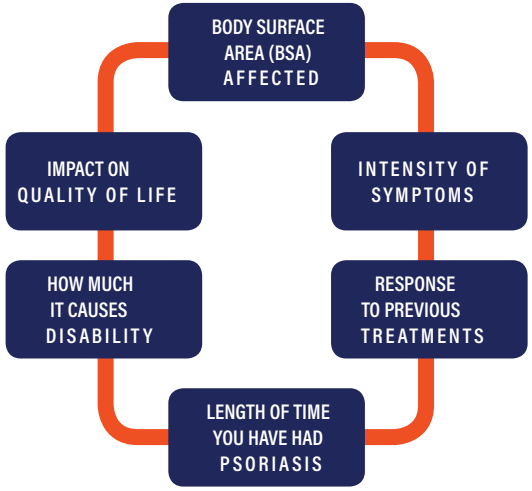
- Itchy
- Inflamed
- Painful
- Cracked
- Bleeding

HOW MAY PSORIASIS AFFECT MY SKIN?

There may be just a few lesions or there may be many. They can be found anywhere on the body.

Your healthcare professional will need to estimate the severity of your psoriasis in order to decide the most appropriate management strategy for you.

Classification of your psoriasis severity should take into account...



PSORIASIS AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Psoriasis is an autoimmune condition — meaning the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own healthy cells.

In psoriasis, immune cells release chemicals called cytokines, which cause inflammation and speed up the growth of skin cells.

This inflammation can also affect other parts of the body, such as blood vessels, joints, and even the brain. That's one reason why psoriasis is now seen as a systemic condition, not just a skin problem.

Psoriasis is more than skin deep. It affects how a person feels, both physically and emotionally.

LIVING WITH PSORIASIS

How Psoriasis Affects Daily Life

Psoriasis can affect more than just the skin — it can influence how you feel, how you see yourself, and how you connect with others.

Many people describe feeling embarrassed, frustrated, or self-conscious, especially during visible flares

The constant need to manage treatments, deal with itching or pain, and worry about flares can lead to emotional fatigue.

Even simple things — like choosing clothes, going swimming, or attending social events — can become sources of stress.

Stigma and Self-Image

Because psoriasis is visible, people often experience stigma or misunderstanding from others. Some may think it's contagious or caused by poor hygiene — which is completely false.

This can affect self-esteem and body image, sometimes leading to social withdrawal or isolation.

Building confidence takes time, but understanding that psoriasis is a medical condition — not a personal failure — can help you regain control.

Impact on Work and Relationships

Managing psoriasis can affect concentration, sleep, and energy levels. Flares can make it harder to work or attend social events.

Open communication with family, friends, and employers can make a big difference. Many workplaces in Australia have wellbeing programs and flexible work options for people managing chronic health conditions.

If psoriasis affects intimacy or relationships, talking openly with your partner or a counsellor can help rebuild connection and understanding.

Your Mental Health Is Part of Your Psoriasis Care

Psoriasis can be unpredictable, but your emotional wellbeing doesn't have to be. Recognizing that mental health is part of your treatment plan — just like medication or skincare — is a powerful step.

Many people find that managing stress helps reduce the frequency and intensity of their flares.

HOW PSORIASIS AFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH

The Mind–Skin Connection

Our skin and mind are closely linked. When we're stressed or anxious, the body releases hormones like cortisol, which increase inflammation and can trigger psoriasis flares. At the same time, visible flare-ups can cause distress, leading to a cycle of stress and symptoms.

Scientists call this the psychoneuroimmunological connection — it means our emotions, nervous system, and immune system constantly interact.
By calming your mind, you can help calm your skin too.

The Stress–Flare Cycle

1. Stress appears — from work, family, or life events.
2. Inflammation increases — immune activity rises, triggering a psoriasis flare.
3. The flare causes distress — leading to more stress and inflammation.

Breaking this cycle is possible through mindfulness, therapy, stress management, and medical care.

UNDERSTANDING COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Why Talk About Mental Health?

When you live with psoriasis, it's natural to focus on your skin — the visible signs, the treatments, and the flare-ups. But looking after your mental health is just as important as caring for your skin.

Psoriasis is a long-term condition, and like many chronic illnesses, it can affect how you think, feel, and cope. The stress of managing symptoms, the pain and itching, and how others react to your skin can sometimes leave you feeling anxious, frustrated, or low in mood. These emotional reactions are completely normal. They don't mean you're weak — they mean you're human.

Your mind and your skin are closely linked. When you're stressed or upset, your body releases hormones like cortisol that can increase inflammation and trigger psoriasis flares. And when your skin flares, you may feel even more anxious or self-conscious. It becomes a loop — one that can be eased when you take care of both your mental and physical wellbeing.

STRESS: THE BODY'S ALARM SYSTEM

Stress is something we all feel from time to time. It's your body's way of saying, "Something's happening — pay attention!"

A little stress can actually be helpful. It can give you energy to finish a project, meet a deadline, or handle a big day. But when stress doesn't switch off — when your body stays on alert for too long — it can start to wear you down, both physically and emotionally.

For people with psoriasis, long-term (or "chronic") stress can make symptoms worse. This is because stress sets off a chain reaction inside your body that affects the immune system — the same system involved in psoriasis.

When you're stressed, your brain releases chemicals like adrenaline and cortisol. These are the "fight or flight" hormones that help you react quickly when there's danger — like slamming on the brakes to avoid a car accident. But when your body stays in this high-alert state day after day, those same chemicals can increase inflammation, make your skin more sensitive, and even trigger a psoriasis flare.

How Stress Feels

Stress can show up in different ways. You might notice:

- Tense shoulders or headaches
- Upset stomach or racing heart
- Feeling irritable, jumpy, or easily tired
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- A sudden flare-up in your psoriasis

These are your body's "warning lights" — signals that it's time to slow down, breathe, and take care of yourself.

Your Stress and Psoriasis Connection

For many people, stress and psoriasis form a frustrating cycle:

- Stress causes a flare.
- The flare causes embarrassment or worry.
- The worry leads to more stress.

This cycle can feel endless, but the good news is — it can be broken. Simple tools like mindful breathing, stretching, and talking about your feelings can help calm your nervous system, giving your body and skin space to recover.

Guided Relaxation Exercise: Calm in 5 Minutes

Here's a simple relaxation practice you can do anywhere — at home, at your desk, or before bed.

Step 1: Find a quiet spot.
Sit or lie down somewhere comfortable. Loosen your shoulders and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose.

Step 2: Notice your body.
As you breathe, gently scan your body from head to toe. Notice where you're holding tension — maybe your jaw, shoulders, or stomach.

Step 3: Release.
As you exhale, imagine letting go of that tension — like air leaving a balloon. You don't need to force it; just allow your body to soften a little more with each breath.

Step 4: Count your breath.
Try this simple rhythm:

- Inhale slowly for 4 counts
- Hold for 2 counts
- Exhale gently for 6 counts
- Repeat for a few minutes. Feel the warmth in your chest as your body begins to settle.

Step 5: Finish gently.
When you're ready, take one more deep breath, stretch your hands and shoulders, and notice how you feel. Even two minutes of calm breathing can help lower stress and reduce inflammation.

Taking Small Steps Toward Calm

anaging stress doesn't mean avoiding all problems — it's about learning how to respond in a calmer way. Some people find comfort in journaling, others in spending time in nature or talking to a friend.

Try keeping a small note on your fridge or phone that reminds you to pause and breathe. It might say:

"Take one deep breath — I'm safe and doing my best."

In Short

Stress is your body's way of protecting you, but when it stays on for too long, it can harm your skin and your mood.

By learning to recognise your body's signals and practicing small moments of calm each day, you can help ease inflammation, manage flares, and feel more in control of your wellbeing.

You don't need to do it perfectly — you just need to start.
"Take one deep breath — I'm safe and doing my best."

ANXIETY: WHEN WORRY FEELS OVERWHELMING

Everyone feels worried or nervous from time to time. It's a normal part of being human. But for some people living with psoriasis, worry can start to feel constant — like a quiet hum in the background that never really switches off.

You might worry about how your skin looks, whether a flare will happen before a big event, or what others might think if they see your plaques. These thoughts can build up, and over time, they can become overwhelming.

When worry doesn't go away and starts to affect your sleep, energy, or enjoyment of life, it might be anxiety. Anxiety is common, and it's treatable. You're not alone, and there's nothing "wrong" with you for feeling this way.

What Anxiety Feels Like

Anxiety isn't just in your mind — it's a full-body experience.
You might notice:

- A racing heart or tightness in your chest
- Feeling tense, shaky, or restless
- Stomach upsets or nausea
- Trouble concentrating or sleeping
- Feeling "on edge" or expecting something bad to happen

When anxiety stays high for too long, it can make psoriasis flares worse by increasing inflammation and stress hormones. It can also make it harder to follow treatment plans or connect with others — which can lead to more worry and frustration.

Why Psoriasis and Anxiety Are Linked

Psoriasis affects how we see ourselves and how we think others see us. It can make simple things — like going swimming, wearing short sleeves, or meeting new people — feel stressful.

This fear of being judged can lead to social anxiety, where you might avoid social situations altogether. Studies show that people living with psoriasis are significantly more likely to experience anxiety compared with the general population.

Understanding that connection is the first step to breaking it. You didn't cause your anxiety — it's your body's way of trying to protect you. But now you can help it calm down.

Calming the Body and Mind

You can't always stop anxious thoughts from appearing — but you can learn to respond differently when they do.

One helpful tool is the 5–4–3–2–1 Grounding Exercise, a simple way to bring yourself back to the present moment when your mind starts racing.

How to Cope When Anxiety Builds Up

When you notice anxiety building, try these small steps:

- Pause and breathe before reacting.
- Talk to someone you trust — saying worries out loud often makes them smaller.
- Write down your thoughts — journaling helps you notice patterns and release tension.
- Move your body gently — walking, stretching, or dancing can help discharge nervous energy.
- Use calming routines — like a cup of herbal tea, a warm bath, or mindfulness before bed.

If anxiety makes everyday tasks hard, it's a good idea to talk with your GP. They can refer you to a psychologist under a Mental Health Treatment Plan through Medicare. Therapy can teach you new ways to manage anxious thoughts, so they have less power over you.

Grounding Exercise: The 5–4–3–2–1 Technique

Step 1: Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, and out through your mouth.
Now, look around and name:

5 things you can see
Maybe the light through the window, your cup of tea, your phone, your shoes, or the colour of your wall.

4 things you can feel
The chair beneath you, your feet on the ground, the fabric of your clothes, or the air on your skin.

3 things you can hear
Birds outside, a car passing, your breath, or a soft hum in the background.

2 things you can smell
Coffee, soap, or fresh air.

1 thing you can taste
Notice the lingering taste in your mouth — maybe toothpaste or tea.

Take another deep breath. Notice how your thoughts feel slower and softer. You're here, you're safe, and this moment is enough.

DEPRESSION: WHEN LOW MOOD LASTS

Feeling sad or flat from time to time is part of life — we all have days that feel heavy. But when that sadness lingers for weeks, makes it hard to get out of bed, or drains the joy from things you used to love, it might be depression.

Depression is more than just feeling “down.” It’s a medical condition that affects how you think, feel, and behave. It’s not a sign of weakness, and it’s not something you can just “snap out of.” With the right care and support, it’s treatable — and things can get better.

For people living with psoriasis, depression is quite common. The constant effort of managing flares, pain, and stigma can be emotionally exhausting. It’s not unusual to feel isolated or hopeless at times. You are not alone in that. Many people with psoriasis have felt the same way — and found ways forward.

Signs to Look For

Everyone experiences depression differently, but common signs include:

- Feeling sad, empty, or numb most of the day
- Losing interest in hobbies, work, or spending time with others
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling tired all the time
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling hopeless, worthless, or guilty
- Thinking that life isn’t worth living

If you notice several of these signs lasting for more than two weeks, it’s important to talk to your GP. Help is available — and recovery is possible.

Why Psoriasis and Depression Are Connected

Living with a visible, chronic condition can affect your confidence and relationships. Pain, itching, fatigue, and lack of sleep can also wear you down. Over time, these experiences can lead to sadness, frustration, or a sense of loss.

Depression can also be linked to the same inflammation that drives psoriasis. The immune chemicals that cause skin inflammation can affect the brain’s balance of mood-regulating hormones like serotonin and dopamine.

That’s why treating both the mind and body together can have such powerful results.

The Link Between Sleep, Fatigue, and Mood

Poor sleep is common in psoriasis and can make depression worse. When you're tired, your mood drops, and it becomes harder to manage daily life.

Simple steps — like a regular bedtime, switching off screens an hour before sleep, or practicing relaxation breathing — can make a real difference.

Try keeping a small sleep journal for a week: note when you go to bed, how long you sleep, and how you feel in the morning. Patterns can help your doctor or psychologist tailor advice that works for you.

A Gentle Self-Care Activity: The 3 Good Things Exercise

When you're feeling low, it's easy to focus on what's wrong. This activity helps gently retrain your mind to notice small positives — even tiny ones.

Each evening, write down:

1. Three good things that happened today — big or small. ("My coffee tasted good," "I went for a walk," "My skin felt less itchy.")
2. Why they mattered to you. ("Because it made me feel calm," "Because I took care of myself.")

You don't have to force happiness — just observe the moments that felt okay. Over time, this exercise can help your brain start to see more light in your day.

Getting Help and Support

If you think you might have depression, reach out to your GP. They can talk with you about your symptoms and create a Mental Health Treatment Plan. This allows you to access subsidised sessions with a psychologist or counsellor through Medicare.

You can also call Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or Lifeline on 13 11 14 for 24/7 support. You don't need to be in crisis to talk — they're there for anyone who needs to be heard.

If your GP suggests medication, know that antidepressants are common and safe for many people with psoriasis. They can help lift mood and improve sleep. Always discuss side effects and treatment options openly with your healthcare team.

In Summary

Depression doesn't mean you're broken — it means you've been coping with more than anyone should have to handle alone. It's your body and mind asking for rest, care, and kindness.

With treatment, support, and self-care, most people recover and find new ways to enjoy life again. Remember: asking for help is an act of courage — and it's a step toward healing both your skin and your spirit.

FATIGUE AND SLEEP PROBLEMS

Living with psoriasis can be exhausting — not just physically, but emotionally too. Many people describe a deep tiredness that sleep alone doesn't fix. This is called fatigue, and it's one of the most common but least talked-about symptoms of psoriasis.

You might wake up still feeling tired, even after a full night in bed. Or you might struggle to get to sleep in the first place because your skin is itchy, sore, or your mind is busy. Over time, poor sleep can make it harder to cope with pain, stress, and mood changes.

Why Psoriasis Can Make You Feel Tired

There are a few reasons fatigue happens with psoriasis:

- **Inflammation:** Psoriasis is an inflammatory disease. That ongoing inflammation takes energy, leaving your body feeling "worn out."
- **Sleep disruption:** Itch, pain, or stress can make it hard to fall or stay asleep.
- **Mental strain:** Constantly thinking about your skin or feeling anxious can drain emotional energy.
- **Medications or treatment changes:** Some treatments may affect sleep or energy levels — your doctor can help adjust them if needed.

Fatigue isn't just "being tired." It's your body asking for balance and rest — not laziness, but a signal to slow down and care for yourself.

The Mind–Skin–Sleep Connection

When you don't sleep well, your stress hormones (like cortisol) stay high, and your immune system becomes more active. That can make psoriasis flares worse and increase sensitivity to pain or itching.

And when your skin flares, it's often even harder to sleep — creating a frustrating cycle. Poor sleep can also affect mood, leading to irritability, sadness, or anxiety.

Taking small, steady steps to improve your sleep can help your skin, mood, and energy all at once.

Small Changes That Can Help

- **Keep a regular bedtime and wake-up time**, even on weekends.
- **Create a calming night routine** — dim lights, gentle music, or reading.
- **Avoid screens** for at least 30 minutes before bed; blue light can keep your brain awake.
- **Keep your bedroom cool** — overheating can worsen itch and discomfort.
- **Moisturise before bed** to reduce night-time dryness or itching.
- **Limit caffeine and alcohol**, especially late in the day.
- **Talk to your doctor** if itch or pain keeps you awake — there may be treatments to help.

When to Get Extra Help

If fatigue or sleep issues last more than a few weeks, talk to your GP. They can check for other causes like thyroid problems, vitamin deficiencies, or depression, which can make tiredness worse.

You might also be referred to a sleep specialist or psychologist trained in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) — a proven treatment that helps many people improve their sleep naturally.

SLEEP ISN'T A LUXURY — IT'S PART OF YOUR TREATMENT.

Gentle Bedtime Relaxation Routine: "Wind Down in 10 Minutes"

Step 1: Slow breathing (2 minutes)
Sit or lie down comfortably. Inhale gently through your nose for four counts, hold for two, and exhale slowly through your mouth for six. Repeat five times.

Step 2: Light body stretch (3 minutes)
Gently roll your shoulders, stretch your arms overhead, or move your neck side to side. Feel the tension melt away.

Step 3: Soothing skin care (2 minutes)
Apply a soft, fragrance-free moisturiser. Focus on the cool, calming feeling as you massage it into your skin.

Step 4: Gratitude moment (3 minutes)
Think of one small thing that went okay today — maybe you had a nice chat, cooked something tasty, or felt a little calmer.

In Summary

Fatigue and poor sleep are common in psoriasis — and they can affect both your skin and your mood. By learning to slow down, rest deeply, and make bedtime a gentle ritual of care, you give your body what it truly needs to heal.

Remember: sleep isn't a luxury — it's part of your treatment.

CARING FOR YOUR MIND AND BODY

The Power of Self-Care

Living with psoriasis can be demanding — physically, mentally, and emotionally. Between managing symptoms, medications, and the ups and downs of how your skin feels, it's easy to forget to care for yourself in small, meaningful ways.

Self-care isn't about being selfish or adding more pressure to "do things right." It's about giving your body and mind what they need to recover and recharge. It means listening to your needs — resting when you're tired, nourishing yourself with food and movement, and taking time to feel calm and centred.

When you take gentle care of yourself, you're not just helping your mood — you're helping your skin too. Research shows that activities like regular exercise, mindfulness, and relaxation can reduce inflammation, improve sleep, and boost overall wellbeing.

Self-care can look different for everyone. For some, it's a walk by the ocean; for others, it's quiet time with a book or cuddling a pet. The important thing is that it feels good for you.

These next sections will give you ideas to care for your mind, body, and spirit — in simple, kind ways that support healing.

Exercise for Mind and Skin

Exercise can do wonders for both your mental and physical health — and it can even help your psoriasis. When you move your body, you release endorphins — natural chemicals that boost your mood, reduce pain, and ease anxiety.

Movement also helps reduce inflammation, supports healthy blood flow, and improves sleep — all of which can calm psoriasis symptoms and make you feel stronger and more balanced.

Practical Tips for Moving Your Body

- **Start small and gentle -** Begin with short walks, light stretching, or easy yoga. Even 10 minutes of movement counts.
- **Find your joy -** Dancing in your living room, gardening, or walking your dog all provide the same benefits.
- **Try low-impact options -** Swimming, tai chi, and cycling are gentle on joints and good if you have psoriatic arthritis.
- **Listen to your body -** On flare days, focus on stretching or deep breathing instead of high-intensity workouts.
- **Be kind to your skin -** Choose breathable clothes, shower soon after exercise, and apply moisturiser to reduce irritation.
- **Exercise outdoors when possible -** Fresh air and sunshine can lift your mood — just remember sunscreen to protect your skin.

Mindfulness and Relaxation

When life feels busy or stressful, your mind can easily drift into worries about the past or fears about the future. Mindfulness helps bring you back to this moment — the only place where calm can exist.

Mindfulness isn't about clearing your mind or sitting perfectly still. It's simply about noticing your thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgement. With practice, it can lower stress, reduce inflammation, and help you manage flares with more ease.

Practical Tips for Mindfulness

- **Start with your breath -** Take three slow, deep breaths whenever you feel stressed. Notice the air moving in and out.
- **Use your senses -** When washing your hands, feel the water, notice the temperature, and focus on the scent of the soap.
- **Try a short meditation -** Apps like Smiling Mind and Headspace offer free, guided sessions (5–10 minutes).
- **Be present in daily activities -** Try mindful walking, eating, or even showering — focusing on how it feels, sounds, and smells.
- **Don't worry about "doing it right" -** If your mind wanders, that's okay. Gently guide it back, again and again.
- **Use calming cues -** Light a candle, play soft music, or find a quiet spot where you feel safe and relaxed.

Caring for Your Body

Your body is doing its best every day — fighting inflammation, healing your skin, and helping you move through life. It deserves care and kindness, especially when living with psoriasis.

Caring for your body is an act of love. It's not about following strict rules but about creating small, nurturing habits that help you feel comfortable and supported.

Exercise for Mind and Skin

Create a soothing skincare routine - Apply moisturiser after every shower or bath. Choose gentle, fragrance-free creams to protect and calm your skin.

Bathe wisely - Use warm, not hot, water and add colloidal oatmeal or bath oils to soothe itching.

Nourish yourself - Eat balanced meals with fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and omega-3 fats (from salmon, flaxseed, or walnuts) to reduce inflammation.

Stay hydrated - Water supports your skin's natural barrier and helps flush out toxins.

Rest and recharge - Aim for 7–9 hours of sleep each night. A regular routine helps regulate your body's clock.

Move gently - Stretch or walk to keep joints flexible and muscles strong.

Wear soft, breathable clothing - Choose cotton or bamboo fabrics that won't irritate your skin.

Build Self-Compassion

Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same kindness you'd offer a loved one. For people living with psoriasis, this can be a powerful tool for healing.

It's easy to feel frustrated when you see a flare, miss a treatment, or feel like your skin isn't improving fast enough. But being kind to yourself doesn't make you weak — it makes you stronger. Research shows that people who practice self-compassion have lower stress and depression levels and cope better with chronic illness.

Exercise for Mind and Skin

- **Talk to yourself kindly -** When you notice self-critical thoughts, pause and reframe them.
  Instead of: "My skin looks awful."
  Try: "My skin is having a hard day, and that's okay."
- **Name your feelings -** Acknowledge sadness, anger, or shame without judgement — emotions are signals, not failures.
- **Practice gratitude -** Write down one thing your body allowed you to do today — walk, smile, or hug someone.
- **Set gentle boundaries -** Rest when you need to. Say no when something feels too much.
- **Celebrate progress, not perfection -** Healing takes time — notice small improvements and honour your effort.

Seek connection - Share your story with others living with psoriasis — compassion grows when it's shared.

SUPPORT AND CONNECTION

The Importance of Connection

When you live with psoriasis, it's easy to feel isolated — especially if people don't understand what you're going through. However, connection is one of the strongest tools for resilience. Talking with people who "get it" helps you feel supported and less alone.

Connecting doesn't always mean big social events — it can be one supportive friend, a community group, or an online space where you feel understood.

Peer Support and Online Communities

Peer support means sharing experiences with others who live with psoriasis. Psoriasis Australia runs community pages and local events where you can share stories and coping strategies.

Many people also find connection online through forums and social media groups — just make sure the information you read is reliable and respectful.

When sharing online:

- Protect your privacy
- Avoid comparing your progress with others
- Join reputable organisations like Psoriasis Australia

Family and Friends

Your loved ones might not fully understand psoriasis or how it affects your mood. Helping them learn can make life easier.

Tips for talking to family and friends:

- Be honest about how you're feeling.
- Explain that psoriasis isn't "just a skin thing."
- Tell them what helps — maybe listening, or giving space.
- Share this booklet to help them understand.

Helping Someone You Care About

If you're supporting a loved one with psoriasis:

- Listen without judgement
- Encourage them to seek professional help if needed
- Offer practical help — like attending appointments together
- Celebrate progress, not perfection

GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP

Why Professional Support Matters

Sometimes, caring for your mental health means getting extra help — and that's okay. Psoriasis is a medical condition, and your emotional health deserves professional care too. Therapists, doctors, and support workers can help you find strategies that work for you.

Start with Your GP

Your General Practitioner (GP) is a good first step. They can:

- Listen to your concerns
- Create a Mental Health Treatment Plan under Medicare
- Refer you to a psychologist, counsellor, or psychiatrist
- Coordinate care with your dermatologist or specialist

Under the Better Access Initiative, Australians can access up to 10 subsidised psychology sessions per year.

Working with Mental Health Professionals

- Psychologist – provides therapy and practical tools for managing thoughts and emotions.
- Counsellor or Social Worker – helps you cope with life changes or stress.
- Psychiatrist – a doctor who can diagnose and prescribe medication if needed.

Some dermatology clinics in Australia now include psychodermatology services, where dermatologists and psychologists work together.

What to Expect

Therapy is a safe space to talk openly. You can:

- Explore how psoriasis affects your feelings
- Learn coping skills for stress and anxiety
- Set goals for self-care and confidence

You might try CBT, mindfulness-based therapy, or acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) — all shown to help people with psoriasis.

Therapy isn't about fixing you — it's about helping you feel more in control of your life.

If You Need Urgent Help

f you ever feel you might harm yourself or can't cope, please reach out right away:

If in immediate danger, call 000

Other support organisations include:

- Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24-hour crisis line)
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

Managing your psoriatic disease and other associated comorbidities works best when you have a team of healthcare professionals supporting you. Not everybody's health care team will look the same. During your treatment journey, you will come across a range of health care professionals who will be responsible for different aspects of your care. These may include:

General Practitioner (GP) or Family doctor

Your GP is your main point of contact for your health. They help coordinate your care, manage your medications, and refer you to specialists when needed. Your GP can also support you with:

- Regular health checks for diabetes and psoriasis
- Monitoring your blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight
- Coordinating care between your specialists
- Set up Chronic Disease or Mental Health Management Plans

Dermatologist
A skin specialist who treats psoriasis and other skin conditions. They can help you manage your symptoms and keep your psoriasis under control.

Rheumatologist
A doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating arthritis and other joint, muscle, and bone conditions. They help you manage psoriatic arthritis and make sure you're on the best treatment plan for you.

Endocrinologist:
A hormone specialist who helps manage diabetes and related conditions such as thyroid problems or metabolic syndrome. They can help you balance your blood sugar, medications, and lifestyle.

Cardiologist:
A heart specialist. Because both psoriasis and diabetes increase your risk of heart disease, your GP might refer you to a cardiologist for heart health checks.

Ophthalmologist
An eye doctor who can check for diabetes-related eye changes (such as diabetic retinopathy) and for eye inflammation related to psoriasis (called uveitis).

Nephrologist
A kidney specialist who may become involved if you have kidney complications from diabetes or other health issues.

Gastroenterologist
A specialist in gut health. Some people with psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis also develop inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Orthopaedic Surgeon
A doctor who treats bone and joint problems through surgery. They may help if joint damage or pain becomes severe.

Dietitian
Helps you make healthy food choices, manage your weight, and keep your blood sugar stable. They can also guide you on foods that may help reduce inflammation.

Exercise Physiologist
Designs safe and effective exercise programs to help you stay active, manage your weight, and protect your joints.

Podiatrist
Looks after your feet and nails — very important for people with diabetes, as well as for those whose psoriasis affects the feet.

Pharmacist
Can explain how your medicines work, check for side effects, and help you use them safely — especially if you take multiple medications.

Occupational Therapist (OT)
Helps you manage everyday activities more easily and may suggest aids or devices to reduce strain on your joints.

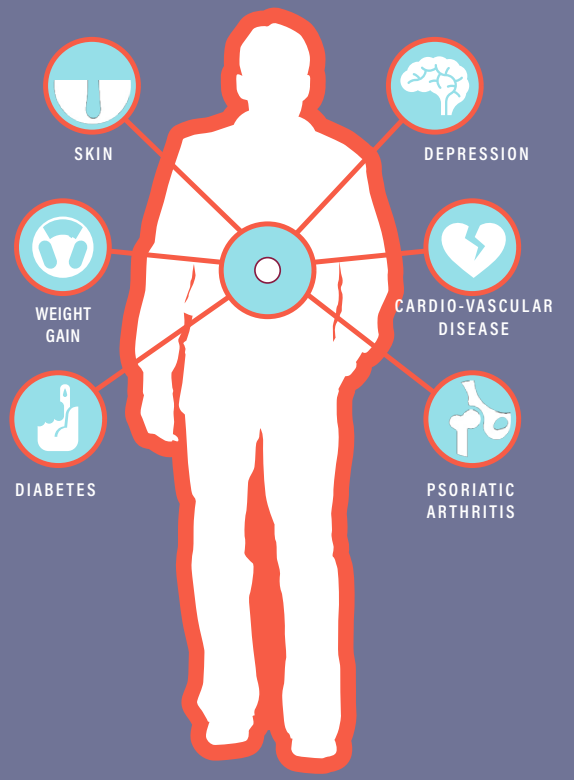
Psychologist or Counsellor
Supports your mental well-being. Living with long-term conditions like psoriasis and diabetes can sometimes feel overwhelming — and talking to a professional can really help.

SHOULD I BE MINDFUL OF ANY OTHER POSSIBLE CONCERNS?

You might have come across the information that individuals with psoriatic disease face a heightened risk of associated comorbidities. A comorbidity refers to a health condition related to an existing ailment, like psoriasis. Conditions such as anxiety and depression are recognized as comorbidities linked to psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Additional comorbidities associated with psoriatic disease encompass cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.

The presence of psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis elevates the likelihood of developing a comorbidity. However, it is essential to keep in mind that being at risk does not ensure that a condition will manifest. Various elements, including personal and family health histories, current or past treatments, lifestyle choices, and the severity of your psoriatic disease, play a crucial role in determining your health outcomes.

The most important thing is not to be overwhelmed. Help is available for all associated conditions.



COMORBIDITIES OF PSORIATIC DISEASE

Psoriatic disease affects more than the skin. Because it is an inflammatory condition, it can increase the risk of several other health problems, known as comorbidities.

Understanding these can help you take steps to protect your overall health.

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE (CV) RISK

People with psoriatic disease have higher levels of inflammation throughout their body. This long-term inflammation can damage blood vessels, making them narrower or stiffer. Over time, this increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. People with severe psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis are at even greater risk.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Have regular checks of your blood pressure, cholesterol, and heart health with your GP.
- Maintain a healthy weight and quit smoking if you smoke.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- Stay physically active most days of the week.

PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS (PSA)

Psoriatic arthritis is a type of inflammatory arthritis that affects some people with psoriasis. It occurs when the immune system attacks the joints and the places where tendons attach to bones. This causes pain, stiffness, and swelling, especially in the fingers, toes, back, and heels. Without treatment, PsA can lead to joint damage and loss of mobility.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- See your GP or a rheumatologist if you have joint pain, swelling, or morning stiffness.
- Early diagnosis and treatment can help prevent joint damage.
- Treatment may include medications to reduce inflammation and protect joints.
- Stay active with gentle exercise and stretches to maintain flexibility and strength.

INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE (IBD)

Psoriatic disease shares similar immune pathways with conditions like Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. These cause inflammation in the digestive tract, leading to symptoms such as stomach pain, diarrhoea, and fatigue.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Tell your doctor if you have ongoing digestive problems.
- A gastroenterologist can perform tests and provide treatment.
- Follow your treatment plan closely and avoid anti-inflammatory medicines unless prescribed.

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Living with psoriatic disease can be emotionally challenging. Visible skin symptoms, chronic pain, and fatigue can affect self-esteem and social life. Ongoing inflammation may also influence brain chemistry, increasing the risk of depression and anxiety.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Talk openly with your doctor about how you're feeling — mental health is just as important as physical health.
- Seek support from a psychologist, counsellor, or support group.
- Stay connected with family and friends.
- Try relaxation techniques like mindfulness, deep breathing, or yoga.

OBESITY

Many people with psoriatic disease are overweight or obese, partly due to inflammation, lifestyle factors, and reduced activity during flares. Extra body fat, especially around the waist, can worsen psoriasis and reduce how well treatments work. Obesity also increases the risk of other comorbidities like heart disease and diabetes.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Aim for gradual, sustainable weight loss through healthy eating and regular activity.
- Speak with your GP or a dietitian for individual advice and support.
- Stay active in ways that suit you, such as walking, swimming, or cycling.
- Celebrate small, steady progress toward your goals.

NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE (NAFLD)

NAFLD occurs when fat builds up in the liver and is not caused by alcohol. It is more common in people with psoriasis or PsA, especially those who are overweight, have high cholesterol, or diabetes. If untreated, it can lead to liver inflammation or scarring.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Have regular liver function tests.
- Maintain a healthy weight and manage blood sugar and cholesterol.
- Limit alcohol and eat a balanced diet.

EYE DISEASE (UVEITIS)

Uveitis is inflammation inside the eye, which can occur in people with PsA. It can cause eye redness, pain, blurred vision, and light sensitivity. If not treated quickly, it can lead to vision loss.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- See an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) urgently if you notice eye pain, redness, or vision changes.
- Follow treatment instructions — anti-inflammatory eye drops or medicines may be needed.
- Have regular eye check-ups if you have psoriatic arthritis.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Chronic inflammation, physical inactivity, or long-term use of corticosteroids can weaken bones, leading to osteoporosis. This makes bones more fragile and more likely to break.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Get enough calcium and vitamin D through food, supplements, and safe sun exposure.
- Do regular weight-bearing exercise such as walking or resistance training.
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol.
- Ask your doctor about a bone density scan.

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

You're not alone. There are many support groups and patient organisations that can offer information, connection, and advocacy. These include:

Psoriasis Australia
National organisation supporting Australians with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.
Provides education, advocacy, and peer connection.
www.psoriasisaustralia.org.au

Beyond Blue
24/7 support for anxiety, depression, and mental wellbeing.
Call 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline Australia
24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention.
Call 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au

Head to Health
Australian Government's mental health resource hub, with online tools and local support.
Visit www.headtohealth.gov.au

Black Dog Institute
Research and education for mood disorders; online programs and self-help tools.
Visit www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

CALL 000 IMMEDIATELY IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU CAN NO LONGER GO ON AND REQUIRE IMMEDIATE MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE.

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60 Pascoe Vale Rd,
Moonee Ponds,
VICTORIA, 3039
www.psoriasisaustralia.org.au