

Psoriasis

A dreaded skin disease

--By Dr. (Hakim) Aslam Javed

The word psoriasis is derived from the Greek word called *psora* which means 'to itch'. Psoriasis is known by different names in different forms of medicine and languages: *apras* in Hindi and *chambal* in Urdu. It is a skin disease, a condition in which skin cells build up and form scales and itchy, dry patches. The affected skin becomes thick and rough and is covered with scales. These scales/plaques can be white and carry a glow. When the condition deteriorates, the scales become thick and red and cover the entire stretch of affected skin.

The condition is usually more conspicuous on ankle, knee and scull. The good thing is that psoriasis is not contagious. People coming in direct contact with psoriasis patients are safe, but the bad thing about this disease is that there is no test to determine this condition in advance or treat it fully. Even blood test cannot tell about this disease. Psoriasis can attack any person but it rarely affects children below ten. Psoriasis is more common in people in the age bracket of 15-40. Currently, 1 to 3 per cent of population in the country suffers from psoriasis. If psoriasis attacks a person, it does not leave the patient till death.

Medicine experts and researchers have not found the exact cause of psoriasis till now. But it is believed that psoriasis is an autoimmune condition; some disturbances and downfall in the body's immune system may be the real culprit. Triggers include infections, stress, and cold. Since the immune system defends the body from various infections and organisms, a balanced and strong immune system also keeps a person away from psoriasis. Experts also believe that psoriasis may be a genetic condition which keeps affecting generations of a family with a history of this condition, but this has not been proved by any scientific evidence.

Psoriasis is not limited to India alone, but is found everywhere in the world and no part of it is immune from it. Psoriasis gives more pain to the patient in summer and their condition may worsen during heat and humidity.

As underlying cells reach the skin's surface and die, their sheer volume causes raised, red plaques covered with white scales. Psoriasis typically occurs on the knees, elbows, and scalp and it can also affect the torso, palms, and soles of the feet.

Psoriasis is a skin condition in which rough and dry scales (like the scales on the body of the fish) develop on the affected skin and they peel out if scratched. In the initial stage of psoriasis, the skin starts developing small red spots. Slowly they get covered by scales. These scales can

be removed by scratching but they recur after some time and cover more parts of the body. Psoriasis is a hard-to-go disease and is very painful. It usually affects ankle, knee, legs, scull and waist.

Psoriasis is also called as eczema. In Tibb, psoriasis is a condition in which immune system has a role. The condition is very painful and psychologically disturbs the patient. As per doctors' experiences, this disease is less common in children and the elderly. It is more prevalent in people in the age bracket of 20-40. It largely affects legs and arms area and also the scull, but is often mistaken as dandruff. So, it is necessary to differentiate it from dandruff.

Various researches have been done in the UK, but so far there has not been any satisfactory discovery to determine about its causes or treatment. The British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) has issued an advisory about psoriasis which can benefit the patients and tell them how to cope with it. The advisory includes basic and useful facts about psoriasis such as: what is psoriasis; its causes; do's and don'ts as well as the places which can be reached for detailed information and help. It also has two papers which scientifically explain types of psoriasis and topical medicines, control and detailed guidelines.

What is Psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a painful skin disease affecting around 2 per cent of the population. It can affect women as well men in any age group. Psoriasis is a recurring, chronic skin condition.

Symptoms:

The most common symptom is a rash on the skin, but sometimes the rash involves the nails or joints. Other symptoms include scales and itchy, dry patches on the skin.

Causes of Psoriasis:

Human skin is a complex organ which covers and holds the entire body. In a healthy body, skin cells grow in a month's time. New cells are produced in the skin and after a period of 28 to 30 days they make their way to the top of the skin. By this time, the old cells of the skin die by regular toweling and showering. People diagnosed with psoriasis however, have a different skin life cycle. The entire process of the skin takes place within 4 to 5 days, as the immune system sends out an incorrect message. Thus, the dead skin cells are pushed onto the surface of the skin. The affected areas become itchy and irritating.

Psoriasis affects the upper layer of the skin due to some unknown reasons, but usually it is considered to be genetic i.e. if a family member had it, it can happen to others as well. But frankly speaking, there is no clear cause of this disease. Sunlight can improve the condition but sometimes it can also worsen it. Those psoriasis patients, who also smoke or drink, are badly

affected by direct sunlight. Injured skin and certain drugs can also aggravate psoriasis, including certain types of blood pressure medications (like beta-blockers), the anti-malarial medication hydroxychloroquine, and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.). But there is no link between food and psoriasis.

According to Tibb, many diseases are caused because our system fails to filter toxins and expel it out of a person's body. Weak or disturbed digestion, lack of personal hygiene, smoking and drinking as well as mental stress can also cause or aggravate psoriasis. Psoriasis is more common in western part of the world than hot and humid countries. According to some experts, psoriasis is caused by some virus.

Psoriasis can be controlled but the patient needs to take severe precautions like minimum usage of soap. If the patient uses the soap, he should also use after-bath lotion as recommended by doctors. If the patient feels an itch as soon as his hand gets dry, he needs to consult his doctor.

Scabies:

The contagious itch/rash is also caused by an organism (scabies) which can only be seen using a microscope. The same organism also causes itching in animals. This type of rash is very contagious and spreads from people to people. The spread is fast when two people share the same bed while one is suffering from this condition. The rashes spread across the body and the itch becomes severe in nights which can also cause red spots. So, it is advised that people should avoid sharing the bed and wearing the clothes of an affected person. The patient can also massage the affected part with oil mixed with sulfur which can ease the condition.