

Getting a-HEAD

of Scalp Psoriasis!



Psoriasis is a chronic, dry, scaly, skin condition in which skin cells reproduce more rapidly than normal. It is a non-infectious condition and affects about two per cent of the population in the UK. It occurs equally in men and women and can occur at any age.

What is psoriasis?

- Psoriasis is a recurrent skin condition that affects about **one in every 50 people** in the UK
- It is characterised as **raised red patches** of skin covered with silvery scales
- The condition can occur on any part of the body although **elbows, knees and the scalp** are usual sites
- Many patients also experience **severe itching or soreness** and a feeling of tightness

Scalp psoriasis

- Up to **80% of psoriasis sufferers** have scalp involvement
- It is more visible to other people and can cause **social stigma**
- Presence of hair can **impede treatments**

The Challenge

Implications of the condition

Psoriasis and scalp psoriasis can have a significant psychological impact on the patient. There is a social stigma and lack of understanding surrounding the condition, which can result in sufferers being unfairly perceived as being contagious or unhygienic. The widespread ignorance about the nature of psoriasis and the real or imagined reactions of others commonly cause reactions such as:

- Embarrassment
- Feelings of isolation
- Diminished self-esteem
- Depression
- Withdrawal from society
- Defensive shyness

What causes the condition?

The causes of psoriasis are not well understood. Certain genetic factors have been identified as being linked to psoriasis. It appears, however, that the condition can be triggered by:

- Physical and emotional stress
- Throat infection
- Injury
- Certain prescription medicines
- Alcohol abuse
- Smoking

Psoriasis is a chronic condition characterised by periods of relapse and remission. Some people may experience long breaks between 'flare-ups' while others will find the condition returning more frequently.

Although there is no "cure", many sufferers can gain relief with appropriate advice, support and medication



Management of psoriasis: your support role

Scalp psoriasis is psychologically, socially and cosmetically disturbing for patients. In your role, you too can provide much needed support for those affected

- The degree of psychological and social disability (e.g. lowering of self esteem) that accompanies psoriasis is commonly underestimated
- Good communication with the customer is essential to help him/her come to terms with what is likely to be a lifelong condition
- Advise customers that psoriasis can be controlled but not cured; explain that psoriasis is not contagious
- Make the customer aware that there are now lots of treatment options and direct them to their healthcare professional - GP, dermatologist or pharmacist
- Encourage him/her to comply with treatment - treatment schedules can be messy and time consuming which can be difficult to comply with, especially when struggling with the psychological impacts associated with scalp psoriasis
- Perming, bleaching or colouring of the hair can be done safely in people with psoriasis (subject to the usual precautions of testing for skin sensitivity before use). If there is active scalp disease with cracked skin, it is best to wait until it has subsided



Please note: Scalp psoriasis shouldn't prevent perming or colouring hair as long as gentle products are used. However, please do check which treatment your customer is currently using as some treatments are known to tint or strip hair colour. These are predominately coal tar based treatments which have been known to tint light, blonde or grey hair and some synthetic vitamin D3 products can strip colour from the hair. Direct customers to their treatment's patient information leaflet for more information.

Treating the condition

Psoriasis, and in particular scalp psoriasis, can be difficult to manage. Most treatments are topical and often patients give up on treatments that do not fit into their daily lives. Some of the challenges faced by psoriasis patients include:

- Application can be complicated and messy
- Treatment time - traditional products need to be left on the hair for up to 24 hours
- Hair can be left with a sticky or greasy appearance
- Interference of the treatment with everyday hairstyling
- Strong, unpleasant odours

The result is that patients may abandon treatment altogether. However, patients now have a much wider choice of treatment formulations available to them from their GP or dermatologist, such as "leave in" scalp treatments, creams, gels, foams, solutions and "rinse out" shampoos.

Occasional 'flare-ups' can be managed by the patient with over the counter products including emollient creams, e.g. E45® and coal tar shampoos, e.g. T-Gel®, Polytar®.

Customers should be advised to speak to their GP or dermatologist who can prescribe more potent treatments to help bring the 'flare-up' under control. These include:

- Salicylic acid and coal tar preparations
- Dithranol
- Vitamin D derivatives
- Corticosteroids
- Systemic immunomodulator drugs

