



# Empowering Patients to Overcome the Social Stigma of Psoriasis

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Managing psoriasis—an immune-mediated dermatologic condition, characterized by red, scaly plaques and/or lesions on the skin—can be challenging in of itself. But one aspect of psoriasis that is not as apparent to the visible eye is the social stigma and misperception that many people with psoriasis often deal with. This can include people asking inappropriate questions, making rude comments, or steering clear because they're afraid it's contagious.

As a dermatologist, I have come across many patients with psoriasis in my practice and heard countless accounts of their experiences of being stigmatized and feeling isolated because of their disease. Getting kicked out of a restaurant or being denied service at a hair salon or being treated differently in the workplace because people don't understand what psoriasis is can be devastating. Such experiences can lead to elevated rates of psychological and emotional disorders, including low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide. These feelings often impact psoriasis patients' relationships, making it difficult to talk openly about how the disease impacts their daily life.

Here is some advice I give my patients who are living with psoriasis:

**Educate yourself and others.** Every patient has their "own" psoriasis. Work with your doctor, a friend, family member, or local support group to find simple ways to express yourself and teach others about your condition. **Find your psoriasis "in crowd."** By working with others who have psoriasis through support groups and organizations like NPF, which provide resources like the Psoriasis One to One program, patients can develop a network of people who understand their disease, and can help each other navigate through their psoriasis journey. **Learn to recognize the signs of depression.** Depression can affect up to 60% of people with psoriasis. Depression has symptoms which are different than just "feeling the blues" like inability to sleep, feeling like you can't get out of bed, loss of energy, lack of interest in things you used to enjoy, and inability to focus. If you are struggling with feelings of depression, consider making an appointment with a healthcare professional. **Have a treatment strategy.** The best way to take control of your psoriasis is to develop a treatment plan in partnership with a doctor. Although psoriasis has no cure, there are many treatment options and you should work closely with your doctor to find the treatment regimen that best fits your treatment needs. **Talk about it.** It's important for people with psoriasis to recognize and communicate their feelings about the condition as it is for them to understand the medical aspects of the disease. Dealing with the stigma of psoriasis can be stressful. **Rise above.** Misperceptions of psoriasis are hard to combat—you can't control what people think but you can control how you react.

, Psoriasis is an immune-mediated dermatologic condition, characterized by red, scaly plaques and/or lesions on the skin. Managing psoriasis can be challenging in of itself, but one aspect about psoriasis that is not as apparent to the visible eye is the social stigma and misperception that many people with psoriasis often deal with – people asking inappropriate questions, making rude comments, or steering clear because they're afraid it's contagious.

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