

Your guide to

Psoriatic arthritis



An overview of psoriatic arthritis

Although there's no cure,
psoriatic arthritis can be managed
in many ways.



What is psoriatic arthritis?

Psoriatic arthritis occurs when there is too much inflammation in parts of the body.



Psoriatic arthritis can affect the small and large joints in the body, including the fingers and toes, the spine, neck or the pelvis.

The condition can also affect the skin, as well as other areas of the body including the back of the heels or soles of the feet, the fingernails and toenails.

For most people, psoriasis appears first, and problems with the joints develop later. The condition varies from person to person – some people have relatively mild symptoms that develop slowly, while others may have severe symptoms that come on quickly.

What are the symptoms of psoriatic arthritis?

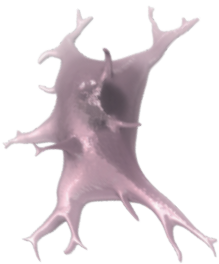
The symptoms of psoriatic arthritis vary from person to person, and can affect different parts of the body. The most common symptoms are:

- painful, swollen fingers or toes
- pain and stiffness in the neck, spine, lower back, knees and ankles
- pain and swelling at the back of the heels, the soles of the feet, or the elbows where tendons attach muscles to bones (enthesitis)
- pain, swelling, stiffness or warmth in any joint
- thickened, reddened skin with flaky, silver-white scaly patches (psoriasis)
- a general feeling of fatigue/tiredness
- sore, red eyes
- discoloured and thickened fingernails or toenails, or nails that separate from the nail bed.

It's important to remember that not everyone will experience all of these symptoms.

What causes psoriatic arthritis?

Although the cause is not known, we do know that psoriatic arthritis is an autoimmune disease, which means the immune system isn't working properly.

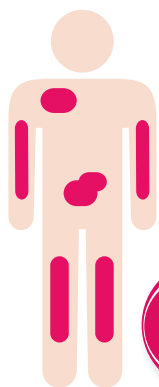


An overactive immune system

Our immune systems normally help keep us healthy by fighting harmful things like bacteria and viruses. But in autoimmune diseases, the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's own healthy tissues and triggers an increase in inflammation which affects different parts of the body.

For people with psoriatic arthritis, an overactive immune system produces symptoms that affect the skin, joints and spine.

If the inflammation is left untreated, it can lead to painful arthritis and permanent damage to joints and bones. However, early treatment can reduce the risk of damage.



Overactive
immune
system

More symptoms

An overactive immune system means more inflammation.

More inflammation results in more severe symptoms.

This is why it's important to reduce the levels of inflammation in the body, and that's where biologic treatments come in.

See over for more information about what treatments can help with psoriatic arthritis.



How does psoriatic arthritis progress over time?

Psoriatic arthritis can be unpredictable – there may be times when your symptoms are worse (flare-ups) and other times when the symptoms almost disappear. Some people may never need treatment, but, for a small percentage of people, the symptoms slowly worsen over time and may lead to increasing disability.

Starting treatment as soon as possible and maintaining treatment for as long as possible can help reduce the risk of joint damage and long-term problems.

What treatments can help with psoriatic arthritis?

There are a number of treatments that can help manage psoriatic arthritis. Using medications early can slow down any damage, relieve pain and stiffness, and reduce the risk of long-term problems.

Everyone is different, so your doctor will work closely with you to develop a tailored treatment plan that's best for you, depending on your symptoms and the severity of your condition.

In general, the aims of treatment are to:

- reduce joint pain, swelling and stiffness
- keep your joints moving freely
- limit joint damage as much as possible
- control any skin symptoms
- minimise the impact of your condition on your day-to-day life.

You might also find it useful to speak with other people who have psoriatic arthritis to hear about their experiences and learn practical ways to deal with the condition.

Ask your doctor or nurse if there is a support group in your area. If there isn't a group near you, online organisations and groups – such as Arthritis Australia (www.arthritisaustralia.com.au) – may be helpful.

Ask your healthcare team for more information.

Physiotherapy and exercise

A tailored exercise and stretching program can help keep joints moving freely, prevent stiffness and relieve pain.

A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can give you advice about suitable exercises, create a tailored stretching program and suggest suitable activities for you (e.g. exercises in water – hydrotherapy – that are less stressful on sore or swollen joints).



Pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medicines

Your doctor may recommend medications to help relieve pain and inflammation. These medications may be useful if you have mild-to-moderate pain or mild symptoms between flare-ups.

- Paracetamol can help relieve pain but it doesn't treat other symptoms, like joint swelling or stiffness.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) help to relieve pain as well as joint swelling and stiffness.
- Corticosteroids have an anti-inflammatory effect and help relieve pain and stiffness. They are usually used for relatively short periods, in combination with other medications.

Your doctor will work with you to find which pain relievers or anti-inflammatory drugs may help with your symptoms.



Biologic therapies

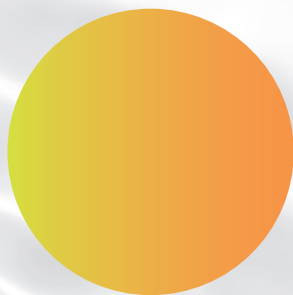
Biologic therapies are medications used to treat psoriatic arthritis that has not adequately responded to treatment with other medications.

They work by targeting specific substances that have been over-produced by your immune system and as a result, that cause inflammation and damage to the joints and other tissues in the body.

There are a number of different biologic therapies available for the treatment of psoriatic arthritis.

Regular blood tests are usually required during treatment to make sure the biologic therapy is working and to check for any unwanted side effects.







Symptom tracker

Psoriatic arthritis

Keep track of your symptoms and monitor your progress

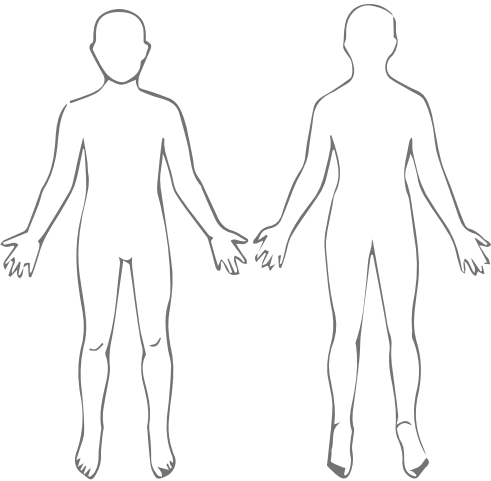
This tracker allows you to keep track of your symptoms and monitor your progress over the next 9 months. Tracking how your symptoms change over time – and their impact on your moods, social life, and ability to work – can help you and your healthcare team check that you're getting the most out of treatment.

► START OF TREATMENT

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

(e.g. pain, stiffness, swelling, psoriasis)



Front

Back









Notes & questions









Write down any notes, questions or concerns to discuss with your doctor

(e.g. triggers for joint pain/stiffness, how long it lasted, what relieved it)

Rate your current symptoms

Circle the face that best reflects your current symptoms.

	VERY SEVERE	NONE
Fatigue/tiredness My overall fatigue/tiredness today is:		
Joint stiffness/swelling/tenderness My joint symptoms today are:		
Pain My pain today is:		
Psoriasis My psoriasis today is:		

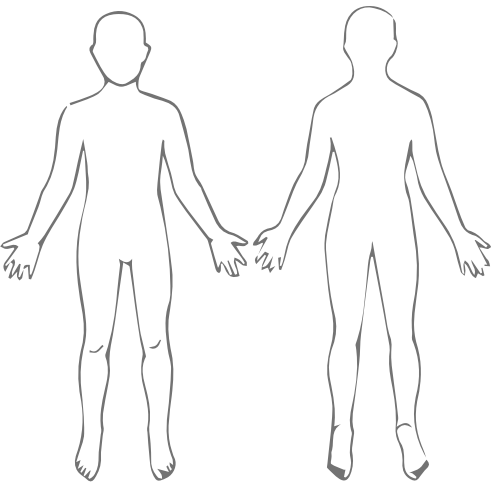
	VERY POOR	VERY GOOD
Mood My mood today is:		
Sleep quality My sleep quality last night was:		
Social activity/relationships My ability to engage in social activities and relationships with friends and family is:		
Work life/daily activities My ability to work or carry out my daily activities today is:		

► AFTER 3 MONTHS

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

**Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms
and what they are**

(e.g. pain, stiffness, swelling, psoriasis)



Front

Back









Notes & questions









Write down any notes, questions or concerns to discuss with your doctor

For example – what helped with your symptoms, or made things worse? What improvements have you noticed? Are there activities you can now do that you couldn't before?

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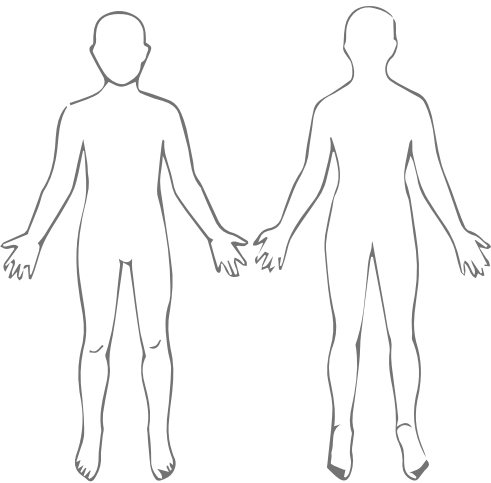
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Work life/daily activities My ability to work or carry out my daily activities today is:		

► AFTER 6 MONTHS

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

(e.g. pain, stiffness, swelling, psoriasis)



Front

Back









Notes & questions









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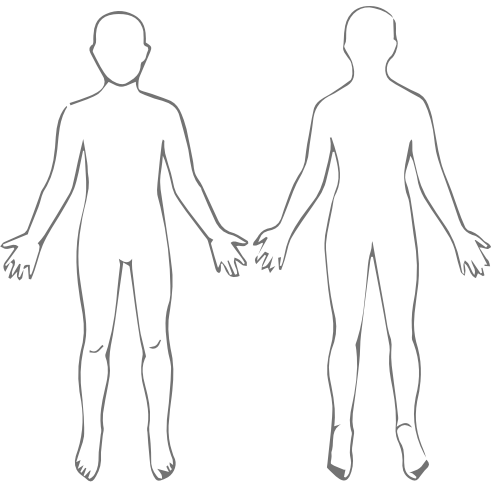
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Social activity/relationships My ability to engage in social activities and relationships with friends and family is:		
Work life/daily activities My ability to work or carry out my daily activities today is:		

► AFTER 9 MONTHS

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

(e.g. pain, stiffness, swelling, psoriasis)



Front

Back









Notes & questions









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	VERY POOR	VERY GOOD
Mood My mood today is:		
Sleep quality My sleep quality last night was:		
Social activity/relationships My ability to engage in social activities and relationships with friends and family is:		
Work life/daily activities My ability to work or carry out my daily activities today is:		

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