



*Living Well
with Psoriatic
Arthritis*



Psoriatic Arthritis Across the Lifespan

The role of estrogen (a female sex hormone) in psoriasis and [psoriatic arthritis \(PsA\)](#) is not fully understood, but there is a general correlation between hormone levels and symptom severity. Some women experience changes in their symptoms that sync with their menstrual cycle. Talk to your health care provider about how hormones may be affecting your psoriasis or PsA symptoms throughout the different stages of your life.

Adolescence

6-8% of children with juvenile arthritis have PsA¹²

Up to 2x more girls develop PsA than boys¹²

PsA is rare in children and adolescents, but appears to be more common in girls than boys. For those who develop PsA at a young age, there are a variety of medications available for treatment. Parents and families should work closely with their pediatric [rheumatologist](#) and focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle (e.g., balanced diet, regular physical activity) early and maintaining long-term health.

Pregnancy and Maternal Health Care

Women with PsA who are considering planning for a family should have early conversations with their rheumatologist and OB/GYN about how their PsA and treatment plan may impact pregnancy. There are considerations for each phase of pregnancy. These include:

- **Before Pregnancy:** Discuss the risks and benefits of staying on or switching your current therapies before trying to conceive to ensure you are optimizing both your and your future baby's health.
- **Labor and Delivery:** If your PsA affects your back and hips, it may present some challenges during delivery. Talk to your OB/GYN about a delivery plan that can safely address pelvic joint pain and stiffness.
- **After Birth:** The fatigue experienced by new mothers can be elevated for women with PsA. Some women report having more severe symptoms or a symptom flare after delivery, so it is helpful to plan ahead. Involve those in your support system in coming up with a plan to help you care for your newborn and yourself post-delivery.

After each pregnancy, women may experience changes in their PsA that require them to adjust how they manage their symptoms.

Menopause

The fluctuations and eventual decline of estrogen during the menopause transition may impact PsA symptoms. Some women experience worse symptom flares during this life stage. The average age of menopause for women in the United States is 51; however, women with chronic inflammatory diseases like psoriasis and PsA are more likely to transition into menopause earlier.¹³ Talk to your health care providers about a care plan that is designed to manage both your menopause and PsA symptoms.

Wellness Tips for Women Living with Psoriatic Arthritis

Healthy Diet

Some women find that an anti-inflammatory diet helps them manage their PsA symptoms; however, long-term maintenance can be a challenge. A healthy diet is always beneficial for promoting overall health. Try to reduce your intake of refined sugars and fatty red meats; instead, aim to eat whole fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and fish. A balanced diet can also reduce your risk for certain health conditions that are related to PsA, such as diabetes, heart disease, and osteoporosis.

Vitamins and Nutritional Supplements

Consuming a variety of essential vitamins and nutrients is beneficial for long-term health. While a healthy diet should be the primary source of your nutrients, your health care provider may recommend supplements as part of your treatment plan if diet alone is not enough. Dietary supplements, such as turmeric, vitamin D, fish oil, and glucosamine and chondroitin (compounds found naturally around joints), methylsulfonylmethane (MSM), and S-adenosylmethionine (SAM-e), have been reported to help with arthritis, but evidence is limited.

Exercise and Weight Management

Healthy body weight and regular physical activity supports healthy joints and lowers your risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Exercises that involve muscle tightening with minimal movement (e.g., planks, wall sits, low squats) are often recommended because they build strength and can be less damaging to inflamed joints. Although you may struggle with fatigue, starting small, taking advantage of windows of energy, and finding activities that you enjoy can help motivate you to exercise regularly. Keep in mind that significant pain with exercise may be a sign that you are overdoing it or that a certain activity might not be right for you.



Stress Management

Managing a chronic condition can be stressful, and high levels of stress can also make symptoms worse. Finding ways to manage your stress is important for alleviating symptoms, adjusting to new routines, and reducing your risk for other medical issues. There are many stress-reducing and mindfulness activities that you can practice (e.g., yoga, meditation). See the [Support Organizations and Resources](#) section of the SWHR Psoriatic Arthritis Toolkit for a short list of meditation apps.

Rest

When living with a chronic condition, getting adequate rest is important for maintaining wellness, especially when you experience symptom flares. While it may not be appealing to scale back your work and social activities, it is important to take care of your body. Ask others for help with activities that are painful, practice self-care and other relaxing activities, and maintain healthy sleep habits to improve your overall rest.

Sexual Health

Symptoms of psoriasis and PsA may affect your sex life in ways that might be difficult or uncomfortable to discuss. Women may experience changes in body image or self-esteem, or even changes in libido related to certain medications. Try using vaginal lubricants or planning intimate moments for times when you tend to feel at your best (e.g., after taking medication or on rest days when you are less fatigued). Communicating with your partner about your symptoms and challenges is important to addressing your sexual health and intimacy needs. Your health care provider can also assist with suggestions for over-the-counter or prescription medications, or referrals to other providers who specialize in sexual health.

School-Work-Life Harmony

Maintaining a comfortable work and learning environment can help reduce symptoms and their overall impact on your work-life balance. Some PsA-friendly accommodations for a school or workplace environment include:

- Flexible or alternative work/class schedule
- Working/learning remotely
- Extra or frequent breaks throughout the day to remain active
- Using adaptive technology (dictation or recorders) to reduce writing and typing
- Optimizing your workspace with an adjustable desk or temperature modifications

If your school or workplace does not already have certain PsA-friendly accommodations or policies, it might be appropriate to speak with your supervisor or Human Resources department at work or an administrator or student support services at your school. Productive conversations with your employer and institution about your PsA experience can help them to better understand and support your needs and decide what types of accommodations you or others might need going forward.



Community of Support

There are many opportunities for support in your journey with PsA. Identify a circle of support where you can share your experiences and ask for advice or help when needed. This community may be able to help you maintain your health and wellness. You can also expand your circle by exploring local or virtual support groups. See the [Support Organizations and Resources](#) section of the SWHR Psoriatic Arthritis Toolkit for a list of places to start.

Emotional Wellness and Seeking Support

1.5x more women are diagnosed with anxiety than men¹⁴

2x more women have depression than men¹⁵

Anxiety and depression are more common among people with chronic conditions, and studies show that having anxiety or depression can decrease your pain tolerance, making the symptoms from chronic disease feel worse. Anxiety and depression can also increase fatigue and make it more difficult to stick to your treatment plan. With multiple medications to manage, challenges with completing daily tasks, and persistent fatigue, it is understandable that people living with PsA might struggle to stay afloat, so it is imperative to take steps to interrupt the spiral of worsening symptoms.

Women with PsA are 1.5x more likely to have depression¹⁶

Warning Signs

The first step in promoting mental wellness is recognizing if you are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression. Common symptoms may include:

- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Nausea or reduced appetite
- Dizziness
- Heart palpitations
- Panic attacks
- Chronic sweating
- Chills
- Irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities

Treatment and Coping Strategies

There are a variety of ways to address mental health concerns. Lifestyle habits, such as eating well and exercising regularly, are a great place to start, but if these alone aren't enough, there are other things to try, such as counseling and/or medications for anxiety and depression. Talk to your health care provider about your options, including whether a referral to a mental health professional would be helpful.



Seeking Support

Sometimes it can be hard to ask for help, especially if it feels like you are losing some of the independence you had before PsA. Letting others support you and your health can make adjusting to a PsA diagnosis easier – both physically and emotionally. Consider leveraging one or more of the support options below and see the [Support Organizations and Resources](#) section of the SWHR Psoriatic Arthritis Toolkit for additional information.

- **Family and friends.** Talking to your loved ones about your experience may help them to better understand and support your needs. Try sharing how your symptoms affect your day-to-day life and suggest areas where they may be able to help make things easier for you.
- **Support groups and organizations.** It might be helpful to speak with other women who have PsA and know what it is like to live with a chronic health condition. There are a variety of ways to connect (e.g., in person, events, virtually, online forums) – try a few to see what works best for you.
- **Mental health professionals.** You may also consider speaking to a trained professional (e.g., psychologist, counselor, licensed therapist) who may be able to offer you specific tools and coping strategies for handling tough moments and support your mental wellness over the long term. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a specific type of therapy that can be helpful for individuals with chronic pain to understand the thought patterns that contribute to anxiety and depression.

Providing Care for Someone with Psoriatic Arthritis

Anyone supporting another person with daily activities and/or medical needs is a caregiver. Some caregivers may be **formal caregivers**. They include paid providers, licensed workers, and others associated with a formal service system. Many caregivers, though, are **informal caregivers** – relatives, friends, and community members that provide care without compensation.

Up to 20% of the U.S. population is a part-time or full-time caregiver¹⁷

61% of all caregivers are women¹⁸

There are many resources and support systems for both patients and caregivers. Below are some considerations when providing formal or informal assistance to someone who has PsA:

- **Ask them about their needs.** The person you are caring for knows their needs best. Instead of assuming how you can be of assistance, ask them where they could use your help. Be sure to check in with them often, as their needs may change over time.
- **Modify the home environment.** Depending on the type and severity of symptoms, changes to the home, like adding shower bars or relocating frequently used items, may make daily activities easier.
- **Encourage or introduce adaptive devices.** Adaptive devices and appliances that eliminate certain motions (e.g., grabbing, pinching, twisting) or make them easier may aid with a variety of daily tasks. Examples may include jar openers, easy grip utensils, buttoning aids, and hands-free devices.
- **Advocate at medical appointments.** Offer to accompany your loved one or friend to their medical appointments so that you may support their care journey. Other ways to help while there include taking notes or asking questions that will ensure they are getting the care they need.
- **Find your support.** Caregivers need support, too. Connect with others that understand what it means to be a caregiver and can lend support to you and your loved one as you both navigate their physical and mental health care journey. Counselors, online communities, and in-person social events are a few examples of some resources to support caregivers.

Caring for someone with PsA? Providing physical and emotional support as a caregiver can be a job in itself. If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek out resources and support for your own health and well-being.



It's important to remember that adapting to a chronic condition will take time. Be patient with the person you are caring for (and yourself) as you both navigate new routines.

See the [Support Organizations and Resources](#) section of the SWHR Psoriatic Arthritis Toolkit for more information.