Skin Issues

HIV and psoriasis

September 2, 2019 By Kate Ferguson

Antiretroviral medications, or ARVs, allow most people with HIV to live longer, healthier lives. But these drugs can also lead to the development of inflammatory conditions, such as psoriasis, in up to 20% of those managing the illness with these meds. (Interestingly, doctors also have noticed that ARVs can sometimes improve symptoms of psoriasis.)

For these folks, treating psoriasis—which causes itchy, dry patches on the skin—can be difficult because the therapies for the condition can further inhibit their already compromised immune system.

But it may be possible to reduce the chance you'll develop the illness by frequently washing your hands and avoiding foods known to trigger allergies, heavy alcohol use and exposure to certain infections that weaken the immune system, such as strep throat, bronchitis and tonsillitis.

In addition, get proper nutrition and avoid skin damage (from bugbites, sunburn or picking at the skin), smoking, stress, anxiety and certain medications used for malaria, high blood pressure and bipolar disorder. Note that changes in weather can also trigger a psoriasis flare.

Over-the-counter or prescription skin creams and ointments may also be effective for people with HIV. These include antibacterial soaps, coal tar, corticosteroid creams, moisturizing lotions, salicylic acid, synthetic vitamin D creams and topical retinoid meds.

Additionally, doctors recommend phototherapy with ultraviolet light, applying aloe vera gel or coconut oil on the skin and taking baths with colloidal oatmeal or Epsom salts for relief of symptoms.

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