



Dermatology Department

Psoriasis and your Heart

Introduction

Recent research suggests that psoriasis is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is a disease which affects the blood vessels or heart. Patients with cardiovascular disease are more at risk of heart attacks and strokes. This leaflet will give you information about how to manage that risk.

Risk factors for cardiovascular disease:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Low amount of exercise
- An unhealthy diet containing lots of salts/sugars and fats

Each one of these risk factors will increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke. If you have more than one risk factor, your overall risk of heart attack and stroke will increase even more. These risk factors can be helped by diet, changes in lifestyle and/or medication.

Psoriasis and cardiovascular disease

There is evidence that suggests that patients with psoriasis are also at increased risk of heart attacks and strokes. This risk is increased if the psoriasis is severe or also involves the joints (psoriatic arthritis).

It is not completely understood why this risk occurs in people with psoriasis, but it is thought to be due to inflammation. Inflammation is when the body produces special cells to fight the psoriasis on your skin or in your joints and these cells are transported in your blood.

How can we reduce the cardiovascular risk of those with psoriasis?

The first step is to identify any other risk factors (as listed above) that you may have that increase your risk of heart attack or stroke. This is done in the same way as in patients without psoriasis by an annual check-up for weight, blood pressure, waist size, blood sugar and cholesterol.

This can be done at your GP surgery, and they will be able to give you advice on these measurements and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

How to manage your cardiovascular risk:

- **Find out** whether or not you are in a high-risk group. High risk patients are those with severe skin psoriasis, or psoriasis that also affects the joints
- **Understand** about the size of the risk and what you can do to reduce it
- **Assess** your existing risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. You should make sure that these risks are controlled as carefully as possible.

Maintaining a healthy heart

This section gives information on factors that impact on the health of your heart:

- **Diabetes**

Firstly this needs to be diagnosed as 1 in 5 people with diabetes do not even know they have got it. A simple blood test can confirm the diagnosis. Diabetes can be managed with diet, lifestyle advice and medication.

- **High Blood Pressure**

High blood pressure can damage your blood vessels and speed up cardiovascular disease. Blood pressure can be reduced by weight loss, exercise, a healthy low salt diet and medication.

- **Blood Cholesterol**

This is a type of fat which is made in the body. High levels of cholesterol increase your risks of heart attacks and stroke. Cholesterol levels can be measured via a blood test. A healthier diet, regular exercise and taking medicines called statins can help to lower cholesterol levels.

If you have psoriasis, your dermatologist will work with your GP to help you reduce your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

You are advised to complete the NHS online Health check and seek support from your GP to address any identified health issues.

Online health check:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-health-check/nhs-health-check/>

If you do not have access to the internet to complete this check, then you should seek support from your GP to complete a Health check.

Contact Numbers:

We hope that you have found this information useful. If you have any questions or are worried about anything, please speak to the following Dorset County Hospital Staff:

Dermatology Practitioners: – Answerphone 01305 255118 – please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Useful Websites:

British Heart Foundation
Website: www.bhf.org.uk

Click on the link 'Heart Health'

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If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email pals@dchft.nhs.uk



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