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Gene Therapies for Psoriasis May Reach Market by 2002

News about progress in developmental gene therapies for psoriasis hit the wires this month, giving those whose lives have been touched by the disease reason for new hope.

Psoriasis is a noncontagious skin disorder that most commonly appears as inflamed swollen skin lesions covered with white scale. The most common type is called "plaque psoriasis."

Symptoms range from relatively mild, scattered red patches topped with a sloughing scale, to severe, extensive plaque-type psoriasis, pustules covering the body, or harsh peeling of the skin.

Currently, "dermatologists will often suggest over-the-counter ointments to relieve psoriasis, such as topical cortisone and vitamin D creams," says Janee Steinberg, MD, a Tamarack, Fla., dermatologist. "However in more severe cases, an oral medication can be prescribed."

Problem is, the drugs now used to treat severe psoriasis, can themselves be harmful.

- Methotrexate is an aggressive cancer drug
- Cyclosporin is an immune-system suppressant that is thought to cause cancer
- Topical steroids can lead to skin atrophy

What's more, experimentation among treatments is often required to find a treatment that works for an individual.

No definitive cure exists.

Researchers working on new therapies hope to create more effective treatments while minimizing side effects. And, they're not all the same.






Some of the drugs now in development modify or block the immune response that causes psoriasis without doing widespread damage to healthy areas of the body.

Other potential treatments work by sopping up tumor necrosis factor, or TNF, a molecule linked to rheumatoid arthritis inflammation, or by targeting an inflammatory protein, IL-8, found in psoriatic skin.

The best part for those now living with the disease is that some of the biotech companies involved in the search for a cure -- namely Abgenix, Biogen, Genentech, Immunex, Idec Pharmaceuticals, and Medimmune -- are saying that a treatment could reach the market by 2002.

To find out more

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- [Biogen](#)
- [Genentech](#)
- [Immunex](#)
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