

Psoriatic Arthritis of the Hand

Psoriasis is a skin condition where people's skin becomes dry, red, and flaky (**see Figure 1**). It can affect any part of the body.

Some people with this skin problem have a kind of arthritis. Arthritis means inflamed joint. Normally, the ends of the bones, at the joints, are smooth, so the ends move smoothly. With psoriatic arthritis, the lining of the joint gets inflamed and swollen. Because this inflammation stretches the tissues that keep the joint strong, the joint may become loose or crooked. Also, the smooth ends of the bones wear out and the bone may lose its normal shape. Psoriatic arthritis can affect the entire body.

Signs & Symptoms

The changes in the joints with psoriatic arthritis are a lot like those in rheumatoid arthritis: the joints look red and swollen, sometimes they feel warm, and they have decreased motion and feel stiff.

Psoriatic arthritis, however, affects men as much as women. The hands may not be affected equally. Usually the two small joints of a finger are affected. Other parts of the hand and wrist are not usually affected.

It may be hard to tell psoriatic arthritis from other types of arthritis because most types of arthritis have stiffness, swelling, and pain. In psoriatic arthritis, usually the swelling affects the whole finger, but more at the middle joint (**see Figure 2**). There may be pitting, ridging or crumbling of the fingernails. The end joint of the finger may become deformed.

Diagnosis

The doctor will mainly look at and feel the hand and look at x-rays. X-rays may show loss of the normal shape of the bone, mainly at the end joint (**see Figure 3**). X-rays may also show swelling around the bone, and the space between the bones may become narrow. The bones may fuse together at a joint. There is no special blood test to find out if one has this arthritis. A piece of skin may be removed to help find out if a person has psoriatic arthritis.

Treatment

Treatment helps to cut down on swelling, redness, and pain while keeping the hands functioning as well as possible. There is no cure for psoriatic arthritis, but there are pills to help lessen swelling, redness, and pain. Different medical specialists usually join together to help with the treatment of this arthritis.

Surgery can help treat the problems of this arthritis. The type of surgery depends a lot on the problems of the patient. A hand surgeon will help to decide which is the best treatment for you.

Figure 1. Scaly, red, dry skin patches from psoriasis on wrist



Figure 2. Sausage finger with swelling of middle joint (PIP)



Figure 3. Pencil-in-cup deformity of end joint of finger. Note loss of bone, narrowing/tapering of the middle bone like a pencil, and cup shaped distortion of the end bone at the joint.

