

My Experience Using Phototherapy to Treat My Psoriasis

By Barbara Brody

Many people with psoriasis notice that their condition improves after spending some time in the sun. Light therapy, also called phototherapy, takes the concept a step further by using medical equipment to regularly and precisely expose affected skin to a small amount of UVB rays. Whether you have this treatment in a dermatologist's office or opt for a machine designed for home use, phototherapy can be very effective. But it doesn't work for everyone, and there can be downsides.





Phototherapy Treatment

See why phototherapy, or "light therapy," might ease your psoriasis if the medicine you put on your skin doesn't help.

We asked three people who've tried this treatment to tell us their stories.

'Worth the Hassle'

"I've had psoriasis for about 10 years, and about 3 years ago I had a really bad flare-up. I had it all over my abdomen, butt, thighs, elbows, and the insides of my arms. I'd already tried various topical steroid creams, but nothing really worked. The creams were also difficult to apply because I really had psoriasis everywhere.

When my physician suggested that I try light therapy, I was kind of skeptical. But by my third session, my skin was starting to clear up. I was really happy that it worked so well.



Karen Greer

The biggest negative for me was the time commitment. I was getting the treatment at the dermatologist's office, and it was all the way across town. So I'd have to trek across town and sit in the waiting room until it was my turn. The actual treatment only took 20 or 30 seconds, and I didn't really have any side effects. Once, my skin got a little bit red.

At the time, the hassle was totally worth it. I went on and off for about a year, and I haven't had a major flare-up since then. If I did, I would consider phototherapy again." -- *Karen Greer, Indiana*

'Wasn't a Cure'

"I was diagnosed with psoriasis 30 years ago when I was 28 years old. Since then I've tried every treatment imaginable and founded a support group, Overcoming Psoriasis. I tried light therapy very early on in my disease. Biologics weren't on the market yet, and I had heard that light therapy had a better success rate than coal tar or cortisone. Plus, sunlight has always helped my plaques.

DID YOU KNOW

Phototherapy using narrowband ultraviolet B (NB-UVB) is recommended for psoriasis over more effective psoralen plus ultraviolet A (PUVA) therapy because it's cheaper, safer, and more convenient.

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a Psoriasis Flare**

At first I experienced burning, but overall I had good results. Still, it wasn't a cure, and I eventually went on biologics. I now rely on biologics, OTC topicals, and [natural] sunlight. If my biologics ever stop working, I'd certainly try light therapy again.

If you decide to try it, remember to wear eye protection and be careful with the increments of time; you can burn yourself easily in just a few short seconds." —

Todd Bello, Florida

'Likes It Better Than Creams'

“My son, Logan, has always had some skin problems, but we thought it was just eczema. Then last March, right around the time when schools shut down because of COVID-19, his skin got really bad all over. We saw several dermatologists, and he was diagnosed with both plaque and guttate psoriasis. We’ve since learned that stress is a major psoriasis trigger.

We tried creams, which helped only a little, and antibiotics, which didn’t do anything. One doctor suggested methotrexate, an oral medication that could cause liver side effects, and I was in tears. We decided to hold off and instead try light therapy along with an elimination diet designed to cut out foods that might be causing excess inflammation. The diet was initially pretty restrictive, but now Logan mostly just needs to avoid gluten and nightshade vegetables.



Logan and Sara Scharf

Thanks to the combination of the dietary changes and the light therapy, Logan's psoriasis has improved dramatically; his skin is now 90% clear! We have a light box in our home -- our insurance paid for most of it -- and it's programmed for the exact amount of time that he needs.

It's important to work up slowly. When we first tried it, he got a little burned, but he's now up to 3 minutes and 10 seconds. That's actually a long time for a 7-year-old to stand still, but he's learned how to do it by himself, three times a week. He likes it so much better than the creams, which he hated so much that we'd have to sneak in and apply while he was asleep.

Logan started seeing some results after a few months, but it took about 6 months for major changes. If you're thinking of trying it for yourself or your child, just know that it's not an overnight fix; you have to be patient." -- *Sara Scharf, Ohio*

WebMD Feature

Sources 

SOURCES:

National Psoriasis Foundation: "Dietary Modifications;" "Phototherapy."

Scripps: "What Are Common Treatments for Psoriasis?"

Karen Greer, Indiana.

Todd Bello, Florida.

Sara Scharf, Ohio.

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