

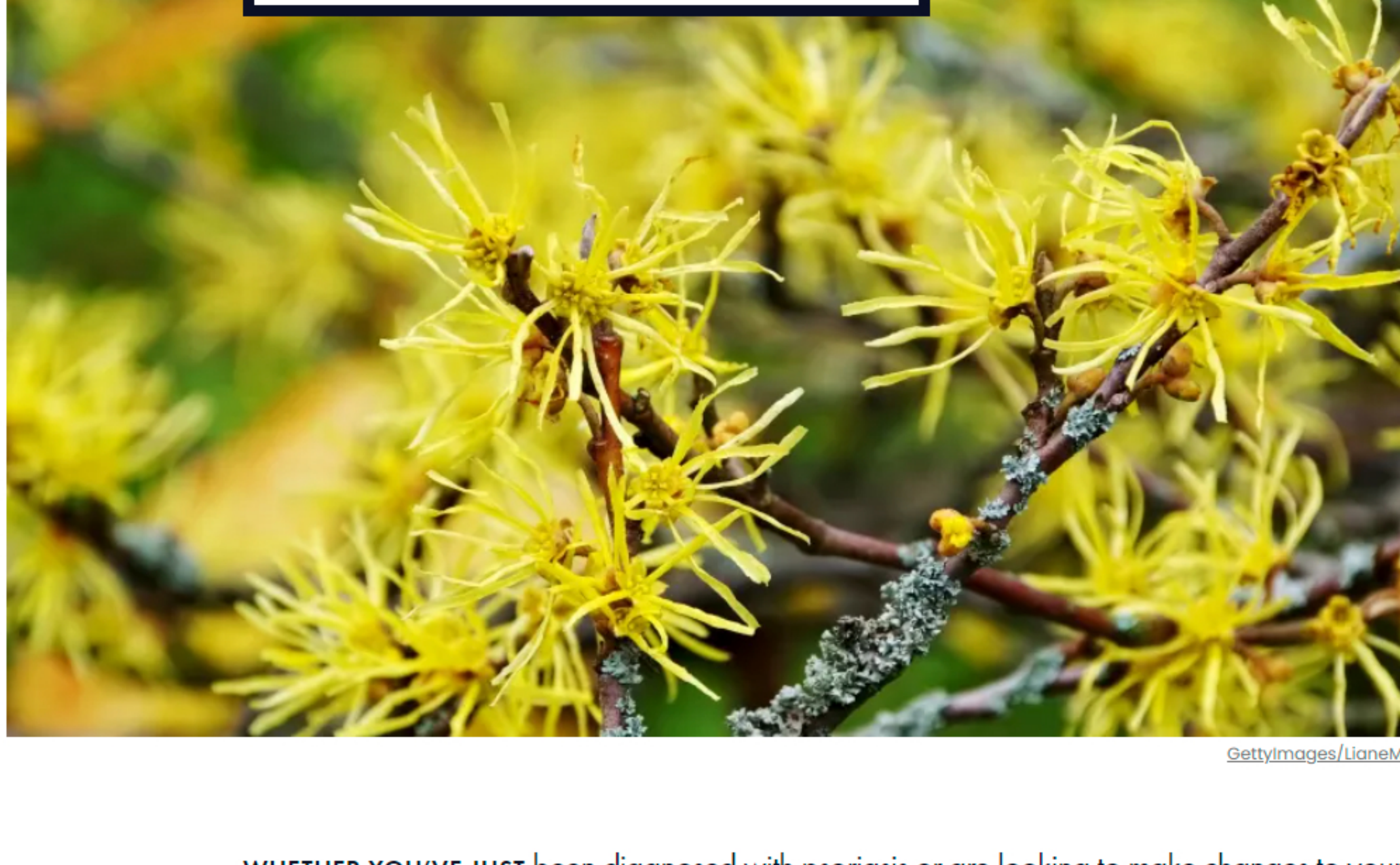
Can Witch Hazel Help With Psoriasis?

The home remedy isn't recommended by dermatologists. Here, some natural treatments to consider instead.

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WHETHER YOU'VE JUST been diagnosed with psoriasis or are looking to make changes to your treatment plan, natural remedies like witch hazel can be appealing—and you may have heard people you know or folks online support their use. But while there are many well-established, science-backed treatments for [psoriasis](#), unfortunately, witch hazel isn't one of them.

That doesn't necessarily mean that witch hazel will worsen your psoriasis. It just means that if you decide to try it, you'll largely be relying on anecdotal reports on its benefits. And while the plant-based remedy does have some beneficial properties, it also can be irritating, say dermatologists. Here's what doctors say about this natural remedy—and others you may want to consider instead.

What Is Psoriasis?

Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory skin disease that's driven by an [immune system dysfunction](#) and the related inflammation that goes along with it. The result: Skin cells grow much more rapidly than they should and pile up. [Symptoms](#) of this condition include:

- Burning
- Itching
- Lesions that range from small red bumps to thick, scaly plaques, to large areas of redness (depending on the [type of psoriasis](#))
- Nail changes
- Scalp plaques
- Stinging

What Is Witch Hazel?

According to the [University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service](#), witch hazel is a deciduous shrub or small tree that can grow to about 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide. It's native to the U.S. and Canada, and its leaves turn yellow in the fall. When you look for it at the drug store, you'll see bottles of clear liquid; these contain extracts made from parts of the plant (and usually some other ingredients as well).

Witch hazel has long been used for medicinal purposes. [Evidence suggests](#) native people in North America used it as a treatment for tumors, eye inflammation, and [bleeding](#). Over the years, it has been used as a treatment for colds, fevers, burns, hemorrhoids, and even cancer. Witch hazel also has a long history of being used for various skin conditions, including those related to itching and inflammation.

The question, of course, is does it work? Witch hazel is an astringent, which shrinks tissue, so it's not a bad pick if your goal is to treat itching, burning, and irritation related to [hemorrhoids](#), according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#). The astringent properties also make it worth considering for [acne](#), says dermatologist [Nicole Negbenebor, M.D.](#), a fellow at the University of Iowa in Iowa City and member of the Skin of Color Society.

Does Witch Hazel Help Psoriasis Symptoms?

Overall, most experts don't believe that there is enough evidence to support using witch hazel for psoriasis. And witch hazel is not included in the psoriasis treatment guidelines from the [American Academy of Dermatology](#) that address alternative remedies for psoriasis.

For these reasons, most dermatologists don't usually recommend witch hazel for people with psoriasis, says [David Pearson, M.D.](#), an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School in Minneapolis and a dermatologist with M Health Fairview. Instead, they tend to point patients toward [proven psoriasis treatments](#), including topical steroid creams and oral or injectable medications.

Still, witch hazel does have some properties that theoretically make it useful for psoriasis, namely that it is anti-inflammatory. This has been demonstrated in research on [eczema](#), such as a recent [study in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences](#) on witch hazel and atopic [eczema](#), which found that it helped with itching and skin barrier repair.

However, Dr. Pearson adds that products with witch hazel can sometimes cause irritation in people with serious skin conditions like psoriasis. "I'd be careful about using it," he says.

How to Use Witch Hazel

None of the dermatologists we interviewed recommend using witch hazel for psoriasis. However, it isn't hard to believe that some patients say they benefit from witch hazel, because of its astringent and anti-inflammatory properties, says [Cindy Wassef M.D.](#), an assistant professor at the Rutgers Center for Dermatology in New Brunswick, NJ.

"You're unlikely to see the same results as you would be using topical steroids," says Dr. Wassef. But if a patient says they like witch hazel and it works for them, she won't object to continued use, adding that topical products with witch hazel are generally safe and unlikely to harm you.

If you decide to try witch hazel, Dr. Wassef recommends paying close attention to the other ingredients in a given product. "A lot of formulas aren't just witch hazel on its own," she says. "If you're going to use it for psoriasis, you want to avoid alcohol. Instead, choose one that has benzoic acid [as a preservative], which tends to be soothing."

Regardless of the formula, Dr. Wassef advises stopping use if you develop any redness or irritation.

Other Natural Remedies for Psoriasis

"Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of data-driven recommendations for 'natural' remedies based on high quality studies," says Dr. Pearson. The problem, he explains, partly stems from the fact that natural products such as witch hazel aren't strictly regulated in the U.S. in the same way that drugs are. It's also difficult to get adequate funding for clinical trials on them.

However, there are some non-drug remedies with evidence that you should know about. They include:

Coal Tar

Several studies support the use of [coal tar extract for psoriasis](#), and you can buy [psoriasis shampoos](#) with coal tar over the counter, says Dr. Wassef. However, while coal tar is natural (because it's derived from coal), many people who are interested in natural remedies tend to shun ingredients that come from fossil fuels.

Calcipotriene

Technically, calcipotriene is a drug, because it's made in a lab and you'll need a prescription to get it. But this topical treatment, which has been well-established for the treatment of psoriasis, is simply a synthetic form of vitamin D, says Dr. Wassef. It is commonly used to minimize the use of steroid creams.

Phototherapy (Light Therapy)

Another research-backed option, phototherapy uses UV light to tame skin inflammation, says Dr. Negbenebor. While it's best to use a light box that provides a [narrow band of UVB light](#), natural sun exposure may also help your psoriasis, she adds. The catch is that regular sun exposure comes with a higher risk of [skin cancer](#). If you're interested in using sunlight to help your psoriasis, talk to your dermatologist about how to reduce the risk.

Turmeric

It's "not as good as prescription treatments," warns Dr. Negbenebor, but there is some evidence to support the use of this root for psoriasis. One study, published in the [Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology](#), randomly assigned 40 psoriasis patients to apply a turmeric product or use a placebo tonic (with no turmeric) twice a day for nine weeks. By the end of the study, those in the turmeric group had about 67% improvement on a score that measures [psoriasis symptoms](#) such as redness, scaling, and lesions.

Oregon Grape Extract (*Mahonia Aquifolium*)

Again, while you shouldn't expect prescription-level results, the [NIH National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](#) (NCCIH) reports that at least eight studies have found that psoriasis patients who used topical creams or ointments containing *Mahonia aquifolium* had a statistically significant improvement in their symptoms.

Indigo Naturalis

This dark blue dried powder is an herb and is known in traditional Chinese medicine as *Qing dai*. One small placebo-controlled clinical trial of 24 people with moderate plaque psoriasis found that a topical treatment containing *Indigo Naturalis* beat out a placebo, according to the NCCIH. Additionally, [a recent review on Indigo Naturalis published in the Journal of Ethnopharmacology](#) suggested that topical use might help treat psoriasis by acting on immune cells and signal pathways.

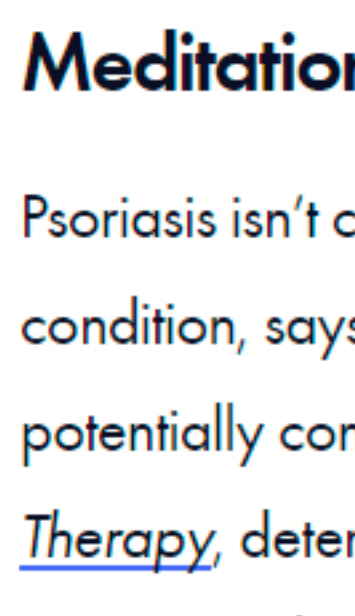
Meditation

Psoriasis isn't caused by stress, but stress is a well-known trigger that may exacerbate the condition, says Dr. Wassef. Meditation is one proven way to get stress in check and, in turn, potentially control your psoriasis. A systematic review, published in [Dermatology and Therapy](#), determined that "meditation can be used as a tool to improve both psoriasis skin severity and patient quality of life in the short term."

The Bottom Line

Don't believe everything you read on the internet: Witch hazel isn't a well-supported treatment for psoriasis. But it's also unlikely to cause harm. If you're interested in trying it, choose a formulation without alcohol and watch out for any signs of redness. And as with any natural remedies, make sure to keep your dermatologist in the loop about what you're using—and stop if you experience any irritation or worsening of your symptoms.

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