

Natural products and supplements

What to know about supplements

Dietary supplements can be extracts or concentrates. Common forms of supplements include tablets, capsules, liquids and powders. The link between the use of vitamins or supplements and psoriatic disease is not yet understood. But some people find that incorporating vitamins and supplements into their diets helps with some of their symptoms.

There can be benefits to adding supplements to your diet, but there can also be harmful side effects. Although many herbs and supplements are natural, this does not mean that they are safe. The quality, safety and effectiveness of these products are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Be sure to speak with your health care provider before taking any supplements. Here are some key points about using dietary supplements:

- Dietary supplements are not meant to diagnose, treat, prevent or cure any disease, including psoriatic disease.
- You should tell your health care provider before taking any supplements. Any substance could possibly interact with your other treatments.
- Natural products and supplements should be taken at least 2 hours apart from other medicines that are over-the-counter or prescription. This is because there is not enough research on the possible interactions between the medicines and many supplements to understand their safety or possible side effects when combined.
- Supplements should never replace medicines your health care provider has prescribed.
- Purity, quality, strength and ingredients of supplements can differ between different brands. They can also differ between product lot numbers within the same brand.
- If you experience side effects or think that supplements are making your symptoms flare, stop taking them and tell your health care provider as soon as possible.

Natural oral products

These products are available in different strengths or concentrations. More is not always better. It is safest to use smaller doses. And it's always best to speak with your health care provider to decide if these products may be appropriate treatment options for you and what the best dosage for your disease would be.

Evening primrose oil is a dietary supplement that can prevent the inflammatory response. There are also studies that show evening primrose oil improves psoriasis symptoms by stopping cell proliferation and cell growth.

Fish oil is a dietary supplement rich in omega-3 fatty acids. There is evidence that shows that omega-3 fatty acids can lower blood pressure and triglyceride levels, prevent heart disease or stroke and help reduce inflammation.

Milk thistle has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. There have been no specific studies investigating the link between milk thistle and psoriasis. But studies do show that the harmful liver side effects from methotrexate can be countered by taking milk thistle.

Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to decrease inflammation. Omega-3 fatty acids also have a benefit to the immune system. There are three types of omega-3 fatty acids. Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is found in plant sources such as nuts



and seeds. Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) are found in fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel and tuna. Other good sources of omega-3 fatty acids include soy, fish oil, egg yolk and sea vegetables such as algae.

Curcumin is available as a dietary supplement and has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, antiviral, antifungal, chemo-preventive and chemotherapeutic effects. Studies show that curcumin may be effective in treating nail psoriasis. It is also reported to be able to decrease psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis flares.

Turmeric can be found in a ground form as a spice or as a dietary supplement. It has all of the health benefits of curcumin: anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, antiviral, antifungal, chemo-preventive and chemotherapeutic. These characteristics come from turmeric's active ingredient, curcumin. Turmeric can also be effective in reducing psoriatic flares. Keep in mind that the same amount of curcumin and turmeric will not have the same beneficial effects.

Vitamin D is also called the sunshine vitamin. Vitamin D can change the way that cells grow and may be able to slow cell growth. Evidence for use of vitamin D supplements are limited, and high levels of vitamin D can be dangerous. The safest sources of vitamin D are cod liver oil, salmon, mackerel, tuna, milk, cheese, cereals and juices fortified with vitamin D, and egg yolk.

Natural topical products

Aloe vera gel from the aloe plant or a cream can be topically applied up to three times per day to help reduce redness and scaling.

Apple cider vinegar is reported by many people to be able to relieve itch and clear psoriasis symptoms. Apple cider vinegar should be diluted with water at a 1:1 ratio. This can be topically applied to the scalp to relieve itching. Remember to patch-test on a small area of skin that does not have lesions or plaques. Also, rinse your skin after the solution has dried to prevent irritation. This solution should not be applied on cracked or bleeding skin, as it can cause a burning sensation.

Capsaicin is an ingredient in chili peppers. It can be found in some creams and ointments to reduce pain, inflammation, redness and scaling. But its long-term benefits and safety are unknown.

Coconut oil, especially virgin coconut oil, has been shown to reduce pain and inflammation as an emollient.

Dead Sea salts can be added to a warm bath for soaking for approximately 15 minutes to help remove scales and lessen itching. It's important to apply moisturizer after a soak with salts. Epsom salts are not the same as Dead Sea salts. But there are reports that soaking in an Epsom salt bath can help relieve itch or inflammation.

Mahonia aquifolium, or Oregon grape, has been shown to have antiproliferative, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory effects. Mahonia extract comes in a cream or ointment form. It has been shown in studies to be safe and effective in treating mild to moderate psoriasis.

Oats can be applied topically as a paste or can be added to a bath to relieve itchiness and reduce redness.

Tea tree oil is available as an essential oil or can be found in shampoos and has been reported to help relieve scalp psoriasis. If using the essential oil form of tea tree oil, dilute 2 to 3 drops with approximately 1 teaspoon of a carrier oil before applying it directly onto skin. A carrier oil is a vegetable oil, such as olive, grapeseed, coconut or avocado. You should patch-test on a small area of skin that does not have lesions or plaques to avoid increasing psoriatic symptoms. Speak with your health care provider about recommendations if you are pregnant or nursing, or for use with children or the elderly.

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