

Psoriasis...
you won't stop me!

Say what you feel



see psoriasis:
look deeper

NHS

Royal Free London

NHS Foundation Trust

err...

Psoriasis... You Won't Stop Me

This booklet is part of the Psoriasis... You Won't Stop Me series: six booklets designed to help people with psoriasis recognise and manage the feelings and emotions that are often associated with the condition. The booklets have been produced by the See Psoriasis: Look Deeper collaboration and authored by experts in dermatology and psychology who have supported many people with psoriasis. The booklets have also been reviewed by people living with psoriasis.

To view all the booklets in this series and to find out more about See Psoriasis: Look Deeper, visit www.seepsoriasislookdeeper.co.uk. Other titles in this series are:

- Overcome your embarrassment
- Feel good about yourself
- Overcome anxiety & fear of uncertainty
- Overcome social isolation
- Overcome your need for acceptance & approval of others

Not all people with psoriasis feel all or any of these emotions, and so only use those booklets that are most relevant for you. Whilst these booklets may help, if you feel unable to cope, it is important to make an appointment with your GP.

For more information, or a list of resources used in the production of this booklet, please contact the Psoriasis Association.

About the authors



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About this booklet

We all experience emotions. Emotions are an important part of being human and are essential to our survival. We feel a whole range of emotions: some of these make us feel comfortable whilst others have the opposite effect. People who have problems with expressing their emotions often experience physical conditions and some may become obsessive about things, over-controlling and rigid. They may experience intense anxiety, fear of disapproval or loss of emotional control.

Research has shown that people with psoriasis find it difficult to talk about how they feel. They may find it difficult to recognise their emotions and communicate how they feel to others. Showing their emotions may make them feel extremely vulnerable.

This means that many people with psoriasis tend to over-control their emotions and are unable to express them even in situations where it is perfectly safe and appropriate to do so. This in turn can have a detrimental effect on their psoriasis.

Playing detective



It is important to identify what you feel. You may think that you must inhibit emotions and impulses because any expression of feelings would lead to embarrassment, humiliation, punishment, shame or a loss of self-esteem. This is not just for strong negative emotions such as anger but also joy, excitement, love and affection.

 Write below some emotions you might find difficult communicating to others:

Why change?



Keeping your emotions inside can be damaging since it stops you dealing effectively with events in your life. Studies have shown that distress is linked to psoriasis flares and that people with psoriasis struggle to talk freely about their distress.

To help you understand why this happens, imagine a boiling pot of water. Imagine the water as all the emotions and sentiments you have (for example towards your skin, your boss, your friends). The pot continues to boil and the intensity of the heat increases resulting in a stressful environment. When the environment becomes too stressful and demanding the water overflows from the pot and pours down the sides. Similarly, you too can become distressed and overwhelmed with emotions and that can show in your skin!

 Answer the questions below. Use them to understand why it is not beneficial for you to continue inhibiting how you feel and that by tackling this you can improve your quality of life:

The way I feel towards my psoriasis e.g. *I'm feeling sad. This is a normal emotion to have. I can allow myself to have this feeling... I don't have to be afraid of it or try to get rid of it.*

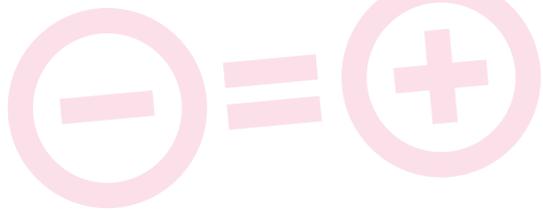
If I continue inhibiting how I feel towards my psoriasis then...

Thought - Emotion diary

Challenging the thoughts you have about expressing emotions is important.

Use the diary below and create a record of what you think may happen if you express different emotions. Next to these predictions describe what actually happens when these emotions are expressed. Are there any differences?

Emotion	e.g. <i>Hurt</i>		
What do I anticipate will happen if I express this emotion?	e.g. <i>People will be sad and angry with me</i>		
How certain am I of this happening? (0-100%)	e.g. <i>90%</i>		
How will I know I am correct?	e.g. <i>Their behaviour & comments will tell me</i>		
What actually happened?	e.g. <i>People were concerned & compassionate</i>		
How much of my original prediction was true? (0-100%)	e.g. <i>10%</i>		
What have I learnt?	e.g. <i>I always expect the worst to happen & expect people to respond in negative ways. This is not what happens, people care.</i>		

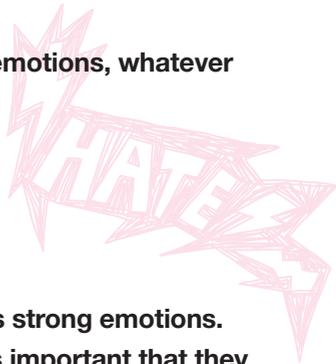


Tolerate negative emotions!

- People who find it difficult to deal with distress are often scared of experiencing unpleasant feelings.
- Negative emotions are important and should not be feared and avoided at all costs.
- Become more tolerant by accepting your emotions, whatever they may be.

Acceptance!

- See all emotions as normal. Everyone feels strong emotions. When people live with health problems it is important that they have an opportunity to express themselves in regard to the negative feelings they may have.
- Accepting distress does not mean having to like emotional discomfort or being resigned to feeling miserable and anxious. Instead it is about seeing the negative emotion for what it is and addressing how you feel.



Learn to watch your emotions 'mindfully'

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations. By engaging in mindfulness you will become more aware, and so more accepting, of your emotions. Use the exercise below to help you recognise, name and accept your emotions.

1. Sit comfortably.
2. Engage in slow deep breathing and focus your attention on this. Notice each breath you take.
3. Allow yourself to explore situations that have been emotionally difficult. These can either be positive or negative.
4. Slowly shift your focus to your body and see how it reacts to this emotional situation. What feelings do you have in your head, face, neck, shoulders, arms, chest, stomach, back, legs?
5. Recognise how each of these feels. Acknowledge that you are experiencing emotions. Are you experiencing more than one at a time?
6. Identify these emotions, for example, is it joy, sadness, happiness, pain, anguish?
7. Learn to accept that it is okay to feel these emotions.

Talking



Talking is a key way to express what you feel. Communicate with others and express both the positive and negative feelings that you are experiencing.

Try it out!

Explore how you actually feel and role-play different feelings and emotions with a group of friends, family or a partner. By trying out these exercises, you will not only explore your feelings but you will also develop your social skills and self-confidence as your fear dissolves.



Having fun



Engage in activities where you would typically have fun. For example, you may choose spontaneously to go shopping, rock climbing or dancing. Taking part in fun, spontaneous activities will evoke a range of healthy emotions for you to experience. Focus on how you feel, say it out loud to yourself or write it down!

***It is important
to express your
emotions
healthily.***

Remember that if you are unsure of the appropriateness of the emotions to express in different situations that using your judgement will help you to avoid humiliation.

Learn to value emotions as much as facts or logical thoughts.

Don't let your emotions inhibit your life.

Remember psoriasis is a common skin condition. It is not something you chose; do not suffer alone!



About See Psoriasis: Look Deeper

See Psoriasis: Look Deeper is a collaboration made up of The Psoriasis Association; Mental Health Foundation; Dr Sandy McBride, Consultant Dermatologist, Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust; Dr Christine Bundy, Senior Lecturer in Behavioural Medicine, University of Manchester and Toby Hadoke, actor, writer, comedian and psoriasis patient.

The aim of the collaboration is to look beyond the physical aspects of psoriasis and recognise the bigger life impacts associated with the disease, including emotional wellbeing and quality of life. The collaboration's ongoing work continues to raise awareness of the full impact of psoriasis and provide helpful resources for both patients and healthcare professionals.

For more information, please visit www.seepsoriasislookdeeper.co.uk

For more information and help contact:

Your GP

The Psoriasis Association* **Telephone:** 08456 760076 or 01604 251620
Online: www.psoriasis-association.org.uk
For under 21s: www.psoteen.org.uk

Mental Health Foundation* www.mentalhealth.org.uk

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