

Non-pharmacological Interventions for Psoriasis: An Updated Review of Diet and Exercise

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ABSTRACT

Psoriasis, a chronic inflammatory dermatological condition affecting a substantial global population, exerts a notable detrimental impact on individuals' well-being. It is intricately associated with autoimmune and metabolic coexisting conditions, with its severity influenced by multifaceted factors including immune responses, metabolic dynamics, and lifestyle elements. This comprehensive review accentuates the potential ramifications of dietary modifications and physical activity on psoriasis management. Hypocaloric and ketogenic diets exhibit promising outcomes in weight reduction, whereas the Mediterranean diet, characterized by a plant-centric approach and healthful fats, consistently demonstrates efficacy in reducing severity of psoriasis. Gluten-free diet emerged as particularly beneficial for seropositive patients with plaque or palmoplantar manifestations. Exercise emerges as a protective measure against psoriasis onset, supported by robust evidence from large population-based observational studies. Future research mandates a focus on personalized interventions, mechanistic insights, and standardized protocols for a comprehensive psoriasis management strategy. In summation, this review underscores the substantial impact of psoriasis, and the intricate interplay of immune responses, metabolism, and lifestyle. Dietary modifications and exercise hold potential for effective management, necessitating individualized approaches for improved outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Psoriasis, a chronic inflammatory skin condition, is identified by red plaques covered with scales, primarily found on the extensor surfaces, scalp, and lumbosacral region.¹ According to the 2019 Global Burden of Disease Study, approximately 4.5 million people worldwide are affected by psoriasis.² The incidence of this condition varies across different regions, with higher age-standardized rates seen in high-income countries and territories.²

Psoriasis has a considerable impact on the quality of life of patients, as indicated by higher scores on the dermatological life quality index (DLQI) when compared to individuals without the condition.³⁻⁶ Factors that predict a lower quality of life

for psoriasis patients include a larger affected body surface area and nail changes associated with the condition.⁶

In addition to the cutaneous manifestations, autoimmune and metabolic comorbidities associated with psoriasis contribute to a decline in patients' quality of life.^{7,8} Psoriasis is linked to psychiatric disorders, including a higher susceptibility to major depressive disorder.⁹⁻¹² Studies have reported a 13.9% prevalence of moderate-to-severe depression in individuals with psoriasis vulgaris.¹³ Psoriasis patients also face a 48% increased risk of unspecified anxiety disorder and a 2.51-fold higher risk of developing anxiety symptoms.¹⁴ All in all, the significant impact of psoriasis on patients' quality of life, and its

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association with debilitating comorbidities necessitate a comprehensive and holistic approach to health in psoriasis patients, including their lifestyle. In accord, this review aims to summarize evidence on the effectiveness of various diets and physical activities on psoriasis severity and patients' perceived quality of life.

The Immunometabolic Basis of Psoriasis:

Understanding the immunometabolic basis of psoriasis is crucial for exploring how diet and exercise might impact its severity. Dysregulated immune responses involving T cells, cytokines, and inflammatory pathways contribute to the characteristic skin lesions.¹⁵ Moreover, metabolic abnormalities, including insulin resistance and obesity, are prevalent in psoriasis patients, highlighting potential links between immune function and metabolism.¹⁵ This evidence is even highlighted in individuals who do not have metabolic syndrome (MetS). Polic et al. showed a significant difference in markers of insulin resistance, including homeostatic model assessment of insulin resistance (HOMA-IR), as well as a homeostatic model assessment of beta cell function (HOMA- β), in patients without MetS and severe form of psoriasis when compared to mild forms of psoriasis.¹⁶

Keratinocyte overgrowth, an essential hallmark of psoriatic lesions, requires more energy, which is produced by the upregulation of glucose transporter 1 (GLUT1) and other enzymes in the glycolysis pathway.^{17,18} In fact, GLUT1 expression levels correlated with psoriasis area and severity index (PASI) scores, and chemical targeting of GLUT1 in keratinocytes was found to decrease imiquimod (IMQ)-induced psoriasiform hyperplasia in animal models.^{19,20} Dependence on

GLUT1 is also manifested in infiltrating effector CD4+ and CD8+ T-cells, which are decreased when topical pharmacological inhibition of GLUT1 is performed in skin biopsies from psoriasis patients.^{20,21} A critical pathway for inflammation and nutrient sensing is the phosphoinositide 3-kinase (PI3K)/Akt/mTOR cascade.²² Multiple pieces of evidence indicate that elevated mTOR signaling plays a role in the development of psoriasis by increasing keratinocyte overgrowth and releasing inflammatory cytokines.²² Specifically, mTOR signaling is essential for T helper effector cell differentiation toward Th1, Th2, and Th17.²³ Moreover, exposure of keratinocytes to IL-1 β , IL-17A, IL-22 and TNF- α has been shown to activate the mTOR pathway and promote proliferation and differentiation stall.^{24,25} The mTOR pathway could serve as a mediator between insulin resistance and psoriasis, as insulin binding to insulin receptor promotes the production of intracellular secondary messengers that activate numerous downstream targets, including mTOR kinase.^{26,27}

Overall, our enhanced understanding of skin and T cell immunometabolism, coupled with the interplay between metabolic and inflammatory pathways, has paved the way for further understanding of the role of lifestyle in psoriasis presentation and progression.

Diets and Psoriasis Severity: Hypocaloric Diet and Weight Loss

As previously shown, insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome predicted severe psoriasis, and in line, evidence showed that weight loss improved psoriatic patients' response to topical low-dose cyclosporine therapy and biologic therapy and had a positive impact on patients' PASI

scores.²⁸⁻³¹ Beside the benefits directly drawn from weight loss, ketogenic low-caloric diets are known to reduce the level of insulin and improve insulin resistance.³²

Castaldo et al revealed that adherence to ketogenic diet for four weeks caused a significant reduction in IL-2 and IL-1 β , along with positive improvement in patients' PASI scores, dermatological life quality index (DLQI) scores, and pain and pruritis scores.³³ A single-arm open-label clinical trial with adult patients who are drug-naïve and are overweight or obese supports these findings. Patients underwent a 10 week 2-phase weight loss program, consisting of a 4-week protein-sparing very low-caloric diet (<500 Kcal/d; 1.2g of protein/kg of ideal body weight/d) and a 6-week balanced hypocaloric (25-30 kcal/kg of ideal body weight/d) Mediterranean-like diet. At 10 weeks, 97.3% and 64.9% of patients had PASI scores' improvements that exceeded 50% and 75%, respectively.³⁴

More radical approaches such as bariatric surgery was shown to improve psoriasis, with improvement levels directly correlating with post-operative weight loss.³⁵ An improved response to biologics was also shown in psoriasis patients who undergoing bariatric surgery.³⁶ Conflicting evidence exists with a retrospective nationwide registry study showing no significant burden in mean PASI after bariatric surgery.³⁷ Education regarding diet, nutrition and weight loss are important in the prevention and treatment of psoriasis and should be essential part of first-line intervention with the aim of improving patients' outcomes.

Diets and Psoriasis Severity: The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet is a primarily a plant-based diet that is characterized by high intake of vegetables, legumes, fruits, nuts, grains, fish, seafood, and extra virgin olive oil.³⁸ Based on the NutriNet-Santé program in France, a significant inverse relationship was found between the ME-DI-LITE, Mediterranean diet adherence survey, score and severe psoriasis.³⁹ Caso et al revealed an association between adherence to Mediterranean diet and lower disease activity index for psoriatic arthritis (DAPSA), and a positive correlation between DAPSA and body mass index (BMI).⁴⁰ The Mediterranean diet was not only linked to reduced psoriasis severity, but also reduced disease risk. For example, lower consumption of olive oil, berry fruits, fish, seafood, tree nuts, and eggs was observed in psoriasis patients when compared to healthy controls.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the benefits of the Mediterranean diet in psoriasis cannot be easily traced to a single nutrient. A meta-analysis of 13 randomized controlled trials showed that fish oil supplement did not significantly reduce PASI scores.⁴² A more prominent association was established for the intake of fibers, phytoosterols, and monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) in psoriasis.⁴³ The mechanism by which these micronutrients improve psoriasis severity might be mediated via their influence on microbiome position. Fibers including cellulose, hemicellulose, inulin, galactooligosaccharides(GOS), and fructooligosaccharides(FOS) promoted the growth of short-chain fatty acids(SCFAs)-producing bacteria including *Bifidobacterium* species and *Faecalibacterium Prausantzii*.^{44,45} Among SCFAs it is butyrate which was found to promote regulatory T-cell differentiation in mucosal T-cells.⁴⁶ Butyrate also activates GPR43

and GPR109a which exert an anti-inflammatory effect.⁴⁷ The expression of GPR43 and GPR109a was reduced in keratinocytes and was restored via topical sodium butyrate therapy.⁴⁸ Topically applied sodium butyrate led to higher IL-10 and IL-18 levels. While, lowering cytokines that hinder the suppressive activation of Tregs, IL-17, and IL-648. Education the role of the Mediterranean diet and an increase in fiber and healthy fat intake is central to the management of psoriasis and improving patients' outcomes and overall health.

Diets and Psoriasis Severity: The Gluten-Free Diet

Previous studies have shown that 16% of patients with psoriasis vulgaris have IgA and/or IgG antibodies to gliadin.⁴⁹ The prevalence of positive anti-tissue transglutaminase antibodies was also higher in psoriasis patients when compared to controls.⁵⁰ Treatment of these patients with 3-months of gluten-free diet (GFD) reducing the number of Ki67+ cells in involved dermis, while also decreasing the expression of tissue transglutaminase by 50%.⁴⁹ Moreover, Michaëlsson et al reported clinical improvement in 73% of seropositive patients who adhered to GFD for three months.⁵¹ A great improvement in lesions of seropositive patients with palmoplantar psoriasis was also noted on strict adherence to GFD.⁵²

A more recent trial by Kolchak et al. found improvement in psoriatic lesions in all gliadin-IgA positive patients, with the decline in PASI and the scale down of pharmaceutical treatment being more pronounced in patients with strong positive gliadin-IgA.⁵³ The Medical Board of the National Psoriasis Foundation stated "We weakly recommend a gluten-free diet only in patients

who test positive for serologic markers of gluten sensitivity".⁵⁴ All in all, GFD seems to improve clinical outcomes in psoriasis patients with positive serology. This, along with the increased prevalence of positive serology in psoriasis patients warrant screening for gluten sensitivity in patients with psoriasis, and the use of GFD in the management of psoriasis.

Exercise and Psoriasis Severity

Several large observational cross-sectional and cohort studies showed that patients with psoriasis participated in less physical activity than non-psoriatic patients.^{55,56} Low levels of exercise may potentially be a risk factor for psoriasis, but psoriasis itself could be a barrier to physical exercise in psoriasis patients.⁵⁷ A survey of 104 patients with severe psoriasis indicated that 40% of these patients avoided sports due to psoriasis alone.⁵⁸ Moreover, a cross-sectional study of 378 psoriasis patients showed an inverse correlation between overall quality of life and level of exercise.⁵⁹ Furthermore, patients with psoriasis may be less efficient in dissipating heat and have reduced sweating over a two-hour exercise test when compared to healthy controls.⁶⁰ Vigorous physical activity was associated with a reduced psoriasis risk in an analysis of the Nurses' Health Study II.⁶¹ Similarly, a Japanese cohort of 487 thousand individuals demonstrated a 13% higher risk for psoriasis in individuals with less than 1 hour of exercise per week.⁶²

Overall, conclusive evidence points to the protective impact of exercise in reducing the risk of psoriasis development. However, limited evidence exists on the benefits of exercise and their extent in the management of psoriasis in affected patients. In a study of 303 overweight or obese

patients with PASI scores above 10, those in a 20-week aerobic exercise program and dietary intervention showed a 48% reduction in PASI, compared to a 25.55% reduction in the information counselling group.⁶³ Apart from this study, there has been a dearth of investigations assessing the efficacy of physical activity in the treatment and control of psoriasis.

Challenges and Future Directions

Despite accumulating evidence highlighting the potential impact of dietary modifications and physical activity on psoriasis severity and patients' quality of life, several challenges remain. The complex interplay between immune responses, metabolism, and lifestyle factors warrants further elucidation. Variability in individual responses to specific diets and exercise regimens calls for personalized approaches. Additionally, long-term adherence to dietary changes and sustained engagement in physical activity present ongoing challenges. Future research should focus on mechanistic insights, standardized intervention protocols, and the integration of lifestyle interventions into comprehensive psoriasis management strategies.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this review underscores psoriasis's significant impact on patients' well-being and its connection to various associated conditions. The interplay of immune responses, metabolism, and lifestyle sheds light on potential mechanisms influencing psoriasis severity. Dietary changes, such as hypocaloric, Mediterranean, and gluten-free diets, hold promise for improving psoriasis outcomes. Furthermore, exercise shows potential as a protective factor against psoriasis, but

its treatment role requires further exploration. While progress has been made, challenges like individual variability and sustained adherence persist. A comprehensive approach, encompassing tailored interventions, mechanistic studies, and standardized protocols, is crucial for advancing psoriasis management strategies.

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