

Understanding skin diseases and their long-term effects

In a world where illnesses are only acknowledged when one is either bed-ridden, hooked up to IV drips, or going through surgical procedures, it's quite natural to think something like widespread pain, digestive issues or uncontrollable itching can easily be nipped in the bud by popping pills or going on stringent diets. What most well-wishers fail to understand is that there's no one-size-fits-all method that applies to the internal chaos brought on by chronic illnesses.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines chronic diseases as "conditions that last one year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both."

Invisible chronic illnesses start small and slowly chip away at our immune systems in a way that is not always evident on a patient's faces or actions. What is often common is the exhaustion and fatigue that comes from living with them, let alone managing them. Here are a few common chronic skin disorders that silently impact many of us on a daily basis.

Skin disorders

Where skin ailments are concerned, Dr Wahida Khan Chowdhury, MBBS, DDV, FCPS (Dermatology) ex-professor and HOD Enam Medical College and Hospital, Senior Consultant, Dermatology, Praava Healthcare, shares that common and chronic skin illnesses among patients in Bangladesh includes fungal disease, psoriasis, atopic dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis, and acne vulgaris. These diseases are spread out across patients of diverse age groups. In order to understand if a skin problem has gone chronic, the tell-



tale signs would be the persistence of the disease for a longer period even without any interaction as well as recurrence or relapse of the disease. In addition to that, the skin becomes dry and flaky, showing bumpy lesions. Even without the disease, the skin starts losing its glow and moisture.



Additionally, there are rashes and patchy lesions.

Psoriasis

Discussing psoriasis, she elaborates that it's a chronic skin condition which can affect people of any age group. It's an autoimmune disease which is affected by genetic and environmental factors.

"Some triggering factors can flare up the disease. For example, stress, certain prescription drugs, hormonal changes, dry season, habits like smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol, and obesity. However, it's not contagious and several treatment options are there, including topical, oral medication, phototherapy, and immunotherapy," says Dr Wahida.

It's not completely curable, but one can reduce his/her risks by living a healthy lifestyle as advised by their healthcare provider. This can be done by maintaining a good skincare regimen and avoiding triggering factors.

Seborrheic dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis is a chronic form of eczema which usually affects the scalp but can spread to other parts of the body as well.

"The disease is found in patients of diverse age groups. In infants it's called 'cradle cap,' and is transferred genetically due to the environment and certain triggering issues which can aggravate the disease process," she explains.

Depending on the severity of the disease, it can be treated with medicated shampoos, topical and oral medication. Healthy lifestyles like exercising, avoiding stress can also improve the condition of the disease.

Atopic dermatitis is a condition that causes dry and itchy skin. It is common in young children but can also occur at any age from infants to adults. It is a chronic condition which tends to flare often but it's not contagious.

"The exact cause of the disease is unknown, however, there are genetic predispositions. It also involves the immune system and there are some other environmental and triggering factors that worsens the disease," shares the expert.

It is one of the most common forms of eczema in children, which can be treated with topical and oral medications. Infant's and children's conditions may flare from

consuming certain foods like nuts, eggs, and cow's milk. Hence, it's ideal to maintain a basic skincare routine to prevent this eczema from flaring.

"A crucial piece of advice for patients of this disease is to keep the body moisturised and avoid dryness. Triggers for atopic dermatitis vary widely from person to person. Hence, it's key to identify the causes and avoid the factors that irritate the disease," she states.

Acne vulgaris

Acne vulgaris occurs when hair follicles are blocked with dead cells, bacteria and oil (sebum). It's most common among teenagers, even though it affects patients of all ages. Certain things like stress, hormonal imbalance, environment, cosmetics, some prescribed medicines and unhealthy lifestyles may worsen its condition. According to the severity of the condition, it can be treated with topical and oral medications.

"There are also other options such as chemical peeling, microdermabrasion, laser and light-based modalities. It's also essential for patients to keep his/her skin clean and healthy and they also need to identify their triggering factors," she elaborates further.

Fungal disease

Fungal disease or ringworm (tinea) is a common contagious skin infection, caused by a fungus called dermatophyte. It can affect all age groups and is transferable from one person to another by direct skin to skin contact or through contaminated items like combs, clothing, or hats.

Dermatophyte thrives in moist warm areas, resulting in jogger's itch and athlete's foot. It can be treated with topical and systemic antifungal medications. This disease can be prevented, by taking some precautions like not sharing clothing, combs, hats, maintaining personal hygiene, drying off properly after taking a shower.

The skin specialist stresses that if neglected, psoriasis, atopic and seborrheic dermatitis can affect more than 90 percent of the body's surface area and can even become life-threatening over time. Acne vulgaris can lead to scarring and depigmentation of the skin, which leads to cosmetic issues that will ultimately affect the patient's self-esteem. Furthermore, patients and their families should gain knowledge about the diseases and the prevention process, their pros and cons and the medical attention that's needed. They must also tailor their lifestyle accordingly, which means being aware of the weather, intake of prescribed drugs, makeup usage, and garments to avoid like synthetic clothing that may trigger their conditions and should continue following their doctor's advice.

By Rubab Nayeem Khan
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