

Dealing with psoriasis

British actor and comedian Toby Hadoke talks about his struggles with psoriasis.

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“A lot of comics talk about things that blight them, like it’s always nice to share stuff with people,” British actor and comedian Toby Hadoke recently told an audience at a late-night comedy venue in London’s West End. “But when I say ‘I’ve got psoriasis’, people go ‘urgh.’”

Hadoke has had psoriasis since he was 11. Now 48, he occasionally incorporates his experiences of the disease into his routines as a way of controlling his psoriasis rather than letting it control him. Psoriasis, he says, isn’t well understood. And for many of the people who have it, it’s no laughing matter, he says.

“It’s painful, it’s irritating and it can really affect how you live and how you are perceived. People get the impression you have a personal hygiene problem and as a result you can spend a lot of time working out how to cover it up.”

Psoriasis affects about one adult in 50, or some 125 million people worldwide, making it one of the most common skin diseases. Caused by skin cells multiplying up to 10 times faster than normal, their sheer volume results in red, scaly patches that can lead to pain, discomfort and even psychological problems.

I didn't realize it affected me as badly as it did because I got used to living with it.

Toby Hadoke, British actor and comedian

The origins of the disease are poorly understood and, until recently, treatments for psoriasis were limited.

Its effects were not, says Hadoke: “Psoriasis has a massive impact on work, on dating, on all aspects of life. Even the clothes I put on – you may notice I wear a lot of beige, well that’s because the skin flakes don’t show up so much.”

Searching for effective treatments, Hadoke tried skin creams, changed his diet, gave up smoking and reduced his alcohol intake. He even tried Chinese medicine and underwent repeated courses of acupuncture. None of it had the desired effect and he remained prone to outbreaks.

“I’ve heard all the success stories, about what people have stopped doing and how it apparently cured their psoriasis. Don’t even get me started on washing powders. Giving up this or that does work for some people, but not for everyone and not for me.”

For many patients, life with psoriasis remains a daily struggle and many resign themselves to limited treatment options and to tolerating the condition's discomfort and inconvenience.

"They get given hydrocortisone cream by their doctor and are told to go away," says Hadoke. "It shouldn't be like this but when you're told there's no cure, this is what you come to accept."

Now, however, new treatment options are becoming available.

Hadoke believes he's been lucky to find a more effective approach to managing the disease. "I endured psoriasis for years," he says. "Eventually I went to a center of excellence at a leading hospital and finally found a dermatologist who uttered those magic words 'I can help sort this out'."

Comedian @TobyHadoke shows us what's funny about psoriasis

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