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This Mom Always Kisses Her Daughter in Public to Show That Psoriasis Isn't Contagious

Here's what you need to know about the condition.



Courtesy of Ashley Nagy

Most parents aren't afraid to show their children affection in public. But Arizona mom Ashley Nagy says she makes a special point to kiss and cuddle her 19-month-old daughter Charlie when the two are out and about because Charlie suffers from [psoriasis](#), a chronic autoimmune disease that speeds up the growth of skin cells—and Nagy says she wants to make sure people know [it isn't contagious](#).

For the most part, Nagy tells SELF that strangers on the playground have been inquisitive, often simply asking, "What does she have?" But some of the "ruder comments are 'Oh my gosh—your daughter is [sunburned](#). I can't believe you have her out in public' or 'I don't want to see that,'" she says. She's also noticed that other kids or mothers will stare at Charlie, and some parents will even keep their kids away from her daughter for fear of "catching" psoriasis. "When that happens, I just pick her up and kiss her neck or cheeks, or rub her arm," Nagy says. "It's my way of not confronting them, but showing that she's not contagious."

Nagy says that she's grateful that Charlie is so young that she doesn't realize what's happening. "I just hope that I've done a good [enough] job that when she starts to realize she's different, she has enough confidence to face people and not take what they say to heart," she says. "You're going to have random people who are mean and cruel—you can't control them, but you can control how you react to them."

Psoriasis is pretty rare in young children, but it can happen.

About 7.5 million people in the U.S. have psoriasis, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. The condition is largely caused by genetics, but having genes associated with psoriasis doesn't mean you'll actually develop the condition. In fact, at least 10 percent of people inherit one or more of the genes that can eventually lead to psoriasis, according to the National Psoriasis Foundation, but only 2 to 3 percent of people actually develop the disease.

That's because, in order to actually develop the condition, you need to have a combination of the genes that cause it and to be exposed to particular triggers, such as stress, an injury to the skin (e.g. a sunburn), allergies, diet, an infection, certain medications (including lithium and the heart medication quinidine), and even the weather, the NPF says.

Although people of any age can have the condition, it's primarily seen in adults. Charlie's symptoms first began soon after she was born, Nagy says, and she was diagnosed with psoriasis when she was 4 months old. "People were shocked at how young she was when she was diagnosed," Nagy says.

People who suffer from psoriasis may experience flare-ups in which they have the characteristic red, itchy, scaly skin patches, but in between flare-ups their skin may look normal. Charlie is now on an anti-inflammatory diet that also avoids gluten and dairy to help try to ward off flare-ups. "That seems to help a lot," Nagy says. But Charlie still suffers from flare-ups, which cause her to develop red patches all over her body that itch. "She'll point to her marks and say, 'Ouchies, ouchies,'" Nagy says. When Charlie has a flare-up, she's itchy and uncomfortable all day, and has trouble sleeping at night. But, when she's not suffering from a flare-up, her condition doesn't really impact her, Nagy says.



Psoriasis is not contagious, and it can be treated a few different ways.

"Psoriasis is caused by inflammation and not an infection, so it's not contagious at all," [Gary Goldenberg](#), M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, tells SELF. Luckily, there are several treatments for psoriasis, and the best one for each patient depends on how severe their symptoms are. Mild psoriasis can be treated with creams and lotions, or over-the-counter medication like steroid creams, Dr. Goldenberg says.

Petrolatum-based moisturizers are often the most helpful because they form a protective seal over the skin to keep it hydrated while also minimizing the appearance of flakes on the skin, Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, tells SELF. People can also develop psoriasis on their scalp, which can be treated with over-the-counter medicated shampoos, such as Neutrogena T/Gel shampoo, Dr. Zeichner says.

For people with more severe cases, there are biologic immune-modifying medications that alter the immune system reactions that lead to psoriasis, Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology and president and CEO of Advanced Skin Care and Dermatology Inc., tells SELF. That includes infliximab, for instance, which reduces the effects of substances in the body that can cause inflammation.

Unfortunately, psoriasis is a life-long condition.

“While it can be treated, it cannot be cured,” Dr. Goldenberg says. “Some patients can experience a remission of their disease that can last years, but this is unpredictable and rare.” In most cases, patients need to keep treating their psoriasis for the rest of their lives to avoid flare-ups. “We can help reduce signs of the disease on the skin, however the rash often reappears if you stop treating it,” Dr. Zeichner says.

If psoriasis runs in your family, you can develop it at any point in your life, Dr. Bailey says, and it’s more likely to show up as you age. Although we don’t know exactly why, it “probably has something to do with the process of aging and how it impacts the immune system,” Dr. Bailey says. If psoriasis runs in your family, she recommends limiting your alcohol intake, maintaining a healthy diet, and getting regular exercise to lower your odds of developing the condition.

Charlie used to have to see her doctor every two weeks to have her blood drawn for testing and monitoring purposes, Nagy says, but now she goes to the doctor every four months for her condition. “We’ve been keeping it at bay with her diet and bath regimen,” she says. Nagy has started a GoFundMe to help pay for her daughter’s medical bills. “A lot of people see ads on TV for psoriasis medications, but they don’t actually know what psoriasis is,” Nagy says. “I want them to see what it looks like firsthand—and to show that it’s not contagious.”