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## Naturopathic approaches for psoriasis: A holistic perspective

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### Abstract

Psoriasis is a chronic, immune-mediated inflammatory skin disorder marked by excessive keratinocyte proliferation and systemic immune dysregulation, leading to significant physical and psychological burden. While conventional treatments such as corticosteroids, phototherapy, and immunosuppressants provide symptom relief, they often come with limitations including side effects, high costs, and diminished long-term efficacy. This review explores the potential of naturopathic medicine as a complementary approach to psoriasis management, focusing on therapies such as plantain leaf baths, steam therapy, mud applications, heliotherapy, dietary adjustments, and stress-reduction techniques. These interventions aim to address underlying contributors to psoriasis, including gut dysbiosis, systemic inflammation, oxidative stress, liver overload, and neuroendocrine imbalance. Preliminary clinical outcomes suggest that naturopathic treatments can reduce lesion severity, enhance skin healing, and improve quality of life. While evidence continues to emerge, further rigorous studies are necessary to validate these therapies and integrate them into standardized care. Naturopathic approaches, when combined with conventional treatment, may offer a safe, holistic pathway for long-term psoriasis management.

**Keywords:** Psoriasis, naturopathy, mud therapy, heliotherapy, herbal treatment, stress reduction, integrative care

### Introduction

Psoriasis is a chronic, immune-mediated inflammatory skin disorder characterized by the rapid proliferation and abnormal differentiation of keratinocytes, leading to the formation of erythematous, scaly plaques. Affecting approximately 2-3% of the global population, it significantly impairs quality of life due to its visible symptoms, associated comorbidities (such as psoriatic arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, and depression), and frequent relapses [1]. While conventional treatment strategies including topical corticosteroids, phototherapy, systemic immunosuppressants, and biologics can be effective, they often present limitations such as adverse effects, high costs, or reduced long-term efficacy [2, 3].

Naturopathic medicine offers a holistic and individualized approach to managing chronic conditions like psoriasis, aiming to address not only the symptoms but also the underlying systemic imbalances contributing to disease onset and progression [4]. Rooted in principles such as the healing power of nature (*vis Medicatrix naturae*), naturopathic therapies incorporate nutritional modulation, detoxification, stress reduction, and various physical treatments to restore homeostasis and promote skin healing [5].

This review explores evidence-based naturopathic strategies for psoriasis management, including dietary interventions, herbal medicine, hydrotherapy, mind-body techniques, and other non-pharmacologic modalities. The objective is to assess the scientific rationale and clinical outcomes associated with these approaches, highlighting their potential role in integrative dermatologic care.

### Pathogenesis of psoriasis in relation to naturopathic approaches

Psoriasis is a multifactorial condition driven by a complex interplay between genetic predisposition, immune system dysregulation, environmental triggers, and systemic

inflammation. From a biomedical perspective, psoriasis involves hyperactivation of T-helper (Th1 and Th17) immune pathways, resulting in increased production of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF- $\alpha$ ), interleukin (IL)-17, IL-23, and interferon-gamma (IFN- $\gamma$ ). These mediators stimulate keratinocyte proliferation and angiogenesis, leading to the characteristic psoriatic plaques [6, 7].

Naturopathic medicine interprets the pathogenesis of psoriasis through a systems-based lens, focusing on restoring physiological balance across multiple organ systems. Several naturopathic principles align with the underlying mechanisms implicated in psoriasis

### 1. Gut-skin axis and intestinal dysbiosis

Emerging evidence highlights the role of the gut microbiome in immune regulation and skin health. Disruption in intestinal flora known as dysbiosis can lead to increased intestinal permeability ("leaky gut"), allowing endotoxins and antigens to enter systemic circulation and trigger inflammation. Naturopathic strategies emphasize gastrointestinal health using probiotics, fiber-rich diets, elimination of food allergens (e.g., gluten, dairy), and gut-healing botanicals such as *Aloe vera* and *Slippery elm* [8, 9].

### 2. Detoxification and liver function

In naturopathic theory, impaired detoxification and hepatic overload may contribute to toxin accumulation and inflammatory skin responses. Although not supported by allopathic frameworks, supporting liver function is central in naturopathic practice. Nutritional detox plans, herbal hepatoprotectives (e.g., *Silybum marianum* [milk thistle]), and hydrotherapy techniques are employed to assist liver clearance pathways and reduce systemic burden [10, 11].

### 3. Chronic Systemic Inflammation and Oxidative Stress

Oxidative stress and chronic low-grade inflammation are key drivers in the persistence of psoriatic lesions. Naturopathic interventions aim to modulate these processes using antioxidant-rich foods, omega-3 fatty acid supplementation (from sources like flaxseed or fish oil), and anti-inflammatory herbs such as *Curcuma longa* (turmeric) and *Boswellia serrata* [12, 13].

### 4. Stress and neuroimmune interaction

Psychological stress is a well-recognized trigger and exacerbating factor in psoriasis. It influences immune function via the Hypothalamic Pituitary Adrenal (HPA) axis, leading to cortisol imbalance and immune dysregulation. Naturopathic care often incorporates mind-body practices such as yoga, meditation, breathing techniques, and adaptogenic herbs (e.g., *Ashwagandha*, *Rhodiola*) to mitigate stress and support neuroendocrine health [14, 15].

### 5. Nutritional deficiencies

Deficiencies in key micronutrients such as vitamin D, zinc, selenium, and B-complex vitamins have been associated with increased psoriasis severity. A naturopathic nutritional approach focuses on individualized dietary assessment and correction of such deficiencies through food or supplementation, aiming to enhance immune competence and skin regeneration [16, 17].

### Naturopathic treatments for psoriasis

Naturopathic treatment for psoriasis focuses on promoting the

body's inherent healing processes through natural, non-invasive therapies that address both the internal and external manifestations of the disease. Among the traditional naturopathic interventions, topical and physical therapies play a crucial role in managing psoriatic lesions and improving skin function [18, 19].

Plantain leaf baths, derived from the *Plantago major* plant, have been used for their anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and wound-healing properties. When used as a bath or compress, the extract soothes irritated skin, reduces redness, and supports the repair of damaged epidermal tissues making it particularly beneficial in inflammatory skin conditions like psoriasis. This botanical therapy is often combined with warm water immersion to enhance absorption and relaxation [20].

Steam baths are another important component of naturopathic care. By promoting sweating and improving peripheral circulation, steam therapy facilitates the elimination of metabolic waste through the skin, which is considered a secondary route of detoxification in naturopathic philosophy. Steam also softens psoriatic plaques, aiding in their removal and relieving itching and scaling. Moreover, the moist heat environment encourages skin hydration, which is typically compromised in individuals with chronic plaque psoriasis [21]. Mud therapy, using mineral-rich natural clay or therapeutic mud packs, offers both physical and chemical benefits. Applied directly to affected areas or used as a full-body application, mud therapy cools inflamed skin, absorbs toxins, and delivers essential minerals like magnesium and sulfur. Its soothing and desensitizing effect makes it especially useful during active flare-ups. Regular use may help in exfoliating dead skin, reducing inflammation, and improving texture [22].

Heliotherapy, or controlled sun exposure, utilizes the beneficial effects of natural sunlight, particularly UVB radiation, which has well-documented immunosuppressive effects on psoriatic skin. Short, daily exposure to early morning sunlight can slow down keratinocyte proliferation and reduce the thickness of plaques [23]. This approach is often preferred in naturopathy over artificial phototherapy due to its natural origin and additional benefits such as vitamin D synthesis, which plays a regulatory role in immune function and skin health [24].

In addition to these, therapies such as chromotherapy (color therapy), hydrotherapy (contrast baths, sitz baths), and relaxation techniques are often used to support systemic healing [25]. Chromotherapy involves the application of specific light wavelengths believed to influence emotional and physiological balance, which may benefit individuals experiencing stress-related flare-ups. Hydrotherapy improves circulation and metabolic function, while stress reduction through yoga, breathing practices, and guided relaxation contributes to hormonal balance and immune regulation [26].

Together, these naturopathic treatments aim not only to alleviate the visible symptoms of psoriasis but also to address the underlying systemic imbalances such as toxin buildup, immune dysfunction, and stress that often drive the condition. When used in combination with dietary and lifestyle modifications, these therapies offer a comprehensive, non-pharmacologic pathway toward long-term management and improved quality of life [27].

### Conclusion

Psoriasis, as a chronic and immune-mediated skin condition, requires long-term, multifaceted management strategies that go beyond symptom suppression. Naturopathic medicine offers a holistic, patient-centered approach that addresses the

root causes of inflammation, immune imbalance, and skin dysfunction. Through therapies such as plantain leaf baths, mud therapy, steam baths, heliotherapy, dietary modulation, and stress reduction, naturopathic care aims to restore systemic balance and support the skin's natural healing processes. While clinical evidence supporting these interventions continues to grow, further high-quality research is needed to establish standardized protocols and confirm long-term efficacy. Integrating naturopathic approaches with conventional dermatologic care may offer a safe, complementary pathway toward improving outcomes and quality of life for individuals living with psoriasis.

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