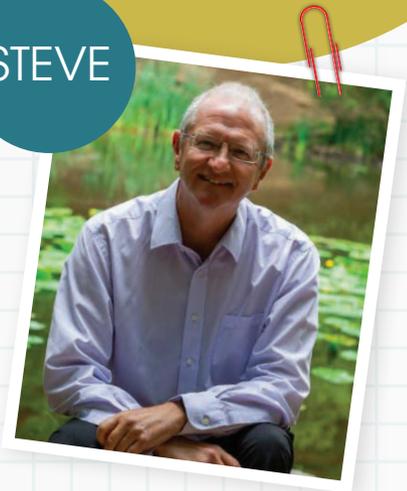


# Comfortable IN MY OWN SKIN

STEVE



**Psoriasis is an immune condition, affecting the skin and sometimes the joints. When a person has psoriasis, their skin replacement process speeds up, taking just a few days to replace skin cells that usually take 21-28 days. This accumulation of skin cells builds up to form raised 'plaques' on the skin, which can also be flaky, scaly, red on Caucasian skin, darker patches on darker skin tones, and itchy.**

Around the age of 20, patches of white flakes and scales suddenly appeared on my knuckles, elbows, knees, feet, and buttocks. I was not sure what caused them, but I do remember I had a very bad throat just before they arrived. Obviously concerned that it was some form of infection, I visited my GP to see what could be done to help me to get rid of them. I left the surgery that day with the knowledge that it was psoriasis and there was no cure and I would probably have it for the rest of my life! I also had a prescription for steroid cream that would help to reduce the scales; I've been using different types of cream ever since.

Coping with psoriasis became part of my life for the next 37 years and I must admit it has been an emotional roller coaster in terms of my confidence about my body. At the time I was first diagnosed I was single, and my self-esteem plummeted as I was very conscious of my skin condition and how prospective girlfriends may react to it. I started to cover my body as best I could – long sleeves and trousers, despite warm weather. My psoriasis would often flare on my hands and the creams were not always effective, so I'd often feel saddened by the glances and body language of others who spotted my scales. I played football

and wearing shorts exposed the large scales on my legs and knees, very often damaged through the demands of the game, such as slide tacking. I remember the sly comments made by opponents to put me off of my game, one in particular when I was called "Elephant Man" – that really hit me hard. My skin could get dry and sore and then crack and bleed; being treated by others like that just seemed to make it worse.

There was very little education around psoriasis in those times, and so the stigma was massive. If I had been given a pound for every time someone asked: "Is it contagious?", I would have been a millionaire, but my life did not feel rich to me. I definitely, was not comfortable in my own skin at that time. However, I was lucky I had a group of close friends, and eventually a partner, who accepted me for who I am and looked beyond my condition. I sadly lost others along the way who were either ignorant, scared or felt that upsetting me was a good idea. Work was a good release and I probably threw myself into that rather than a social life because I could wear a suit and tie so my condition was far easier to conceal. I hated summer and holidays in the sun, even though the sun's rays would actually help reduce the scales. It was the very

thought of the initial disclosure and the questions and looks that usually went with it that caused the dread.

Over the years, education and treatment has been much better. It still can't be cured, but the flare-ups are more under control now. I've now realised that my psoriasis is my very own "stress indicator" – flare-ups get more frequent and worse at times when I am stressed and anxious. So, I turn it into a positive and it reminds me to do more things to manage my stress such as exercise, meditation, reiki and breathwork, and then my psoriasis reduces significantly. Most of my current acquaintances know about my psoriasis and so it's no longer a question or a conversation piece, except for just asking how I am doing.

I can honestly say, this is the very first time I have written about my condition and I'd say that's because I am much more comfortable in my own skin than in my twenties, it has taken a long while, so I can understand how others with psoriasis can struggle both physically and psychologically; I hope they can stay strong in the realisation this condition does not have to define them and it shouldn't hinder doing great things in their life. **For more information about psoriasis- <https://www.psoriasis-association.org.uk/>**