

Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) / Parapsoriasis

CTCL is an abbreviation for cutaneous T-cell lymphoma. It is a general term for many lymphomas of the skin. Cutaneous refers to the skin. T-cell refers to the type of white blood cells that are in the skin and produce the rash. Lymphoma is a form of cancer; however, many forms of lymphoma are internal and can be very serious. Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) tends to remain localized to the skin.

Parapsoriasis is a term that means like psoriasis. It refers to various conditions that produce red scaling patches in the skin. Parapsoriasis and CTCL can appear identical in terms of the rash on the skin.

Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma / parapsoriasis often produce red scaling patches on the skin. These can be localized or very widespread. In many cases the problem produces significant itching, although some patients do not experience this. Many patients have had the condition for years and, at times, multiple biopsies have been performed. In some cases, special stains are done on the biopsies to determine whether this is truly a CTCL or parapsoriasis condition. At times, it can be impossible to distinguish between the two problems.

There is another term that you may have heard. This is called mycosis fungoides (MF). Mycosis fungoides is one type of cutaneous T-cell lymphoma. As with most forms of CTCL, it has a slow course and usually remains confined to the skin. At times, this condition as well as any CTCL can spread to lymph nodes and internal organs and that is why it is important to be monitored regularly.

Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma / parapsoriasis is not contagious. It is not an infection and there are no infectious agents known to cause this problem. Although there is continuing research at this time, no single factor has been proven to cause this problem. There is no supportive research to indicate that this is a genetic or hereditary disease. Studies have failed to show connections between chemical exposure, environment, pesticides, radiation, allergies and occupations.

Fortunately there are very effective treatments for cutaneous T-cell lymphoma and parapsoriasis. One of the more effective treatments is a course of outpatient phototherapy. There is a separate information sheet regarding this treatment. In addition, many different topical agents can be helpful. There are other oral agents that are often used by themselves or combined with the phototherapy. The treatment is individualized and is based on the exact type and extent of the problem that you have.

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to ask me before you leave the office.