



---

March 6, 2009, 10:16 am

## Tim Gunn's Fashion Therapy for Psoriasis



Fashion mentor Tim Gunn.

Tim Gunn may be best known as the exacting mentor to the stressed-out designers of “Project Runway,” but he is also a self-described “fashion therapist,” offering counseling and kindness to style-challenged women on his television show, “Tim Gunn’s Guide to Style.”

Mr. Gunn says it’s the pleasure of helping people “find their fashion” that sparked his interest in his latest role, spokesman for a new awareness campaign directed at the 7.5 million Americans with psoriasis. Psoriasis is a chronic disease of the immune system that appears on the skin, usually as thick, red, scaly patches. This week I spoke to him about his new role and how fashion can help people with the isolating and embarrassing skin condition.

**Q**

*Why did you decide to become a spokesman for psoriasis treatment?*

**A**

My sister has psoriasis, but it wasn’t primarily because of her. I became very interested when I learned that one of the biggest impacts that this disease has on people is that it affects their perceptions of what they can wear. So many people who have psoriasis feel like their wardrobe options are very limited and their own fashion voice is seriously compromised. I want to spread

the word that there are now many effective treatments out there. It was the fashion cheerleader in me, the quasi-fashion therapist who stepped in and said, "I'd love to be part of this message."

**Q**

*Many psoriasis patients are focused on covering up their skin. What difference can fashion make for them?*

**A**

My role is to help people look at this from a positive point of view and bring some practical suggestions about how they can get their fashion right. It's still about silhouette, proportion and fit. The closer your clothes follow your natural silhouette, the slimmer and more polished you will look.

I know most people with psoriasis are understandably inclined to cover it up. I would never say to someone, "Just show it off. Don't worry about it." If one's personality is like that, that's great. But all you need is one bad experience and right away wouldn't the sleeves come back on? It's complex. It's inextricable from someone's emotional health. But there is no reason why you can't be the chicest person in the entire city covered up.

But in the case of psoriasis, with the right treatment, one can have the lifestyle one aspires to. My message really has been, "Go to a dermatologist, then go to Saks Fifth Avenue!" But it's not going to happen overnight. While you're waiting for your treatment to kick in, what are you going to do during that intermediate period? One of the issues with people with psoriasis is the scaling and flaking of skin. People say, "I can't wear dark colors." If your skin is flaking, there are treatments that can stop that. Until then, a person might consider wearing lighter colors.

And it's not just about the clothing itself, but what's between your psoriasis and the clothing. Undergarments can be a wonderful partner in helping with all this. Ointments and lotions and topical treatments can be sticky or oily. If you have a proper undergarment, you can wear a silk shirt or whatever you want.

**Q**

*What's the purpose of the fashion show you're hosting in September?*

**A**

The people who will walk the runway are people with moderate to severe plaque psoriasis who have an inspiring story to tell, who have not been beaten down by this. We want them to be our role models about how you can live with this disease and have a fabulous life. A high percentage of people say this really erodes their morale, gives them low self-esteem and creates levels of shyness and embarrassment that they wish they didn't have.

**Q**

*Do you see a larger connection between fashion and health?*

**A**

It has everything to do with one's self confidence. When you know you look good and you feel good in your clothes, you navigate the world with an erect posture and great carriage and bearing, and you feel fantastic. Clothes do that for you; they definitely do. That's how what we want everyone with psoriasis to feel. It's about self-esteem. The clothes we wear send a message and affect how the world perceives us. What is more profound than that? For anyone who says, "I can't be who I want to be," I want to help that person.

To learn more about the campaign, as well as a nationwide contest for people with psoriasis to win a spot in the fashion show, go the Web site, [www.addresspsoriasis.com](http://www.addresspsoriasis.com). And be sure to check out the [Patient Voices audio feature of men, women and children](#) talking about the challenges of living with psoriasis. And you can find more fashion therapy in Mr. Gunn's book, [Tim Gunn: A Guide to Fashion, Quality and Style](#).