

Skin Conditions

Cancer treatment can affect a person's skin, hair, and nails. Often, skin problems from cancer treatment are not severe, but they can be uncomfortable and noticeable. Some people may struggle with the visible changes or symptoms caused by a skin condition.

Skin conditions may get better over time, but some may not go away. There are options for managing most skin conditions caused by cancer treatment. Relieving side effects such as skin conditions is an important part of cancer care and treatment.

What the patient can do

Rashes, dry skin, and nail and hair reactions are rarely severe. But they can cause major discomfort. It is important to talk with your health care team about what to expect. Also tell your doctor as soon as you start feeling or seeing any side effects. There are early and effective treatments for these reactions.

The following suggestions may help avoid reactions and help relieve them if they do happen:

- At the first sign of a reaction, tell your doctor or a dermatologist familiar with these reactions. Signs of a reaction include a warm or burning sensation, pimples, nail cracks, or dry skin.
- Avoid the sun and use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Re-apply sunscreen every 2 hours when outdoors, or more often if sweating or swimming.
- Use a broad-brimmed hat if going outside. And avoid being in direct sunlight between 10 AM and 4 PM.
- Use a mild soap in the shower. Avoid soaps with strong scents. Shower with lukewarm water and avoid long, hot showers. Also, avoid laundry detergent with strong perfumes.
- Apply a cream-based moisturizer to all skin within 5 minutes of showering or bathing. Use hypoallergenic moisturizers that do not have perfumes or preservatives, such as Vanicream, Aveeno, CeraVe, Cetaphil, and Eucerin.
- Avoid anti-acne skin products that have alcohol or retinoids. They can dry out your skin.
- Contact your doctor if the rash is severe or covers a large area of the body or have a discharge of pus
- For hand/foot skin reactions use creams containing urea or salicylic acid
- Wear thick, comfortable socks and shoes, or try gel insoles. Do not put too much weight on your hands and feet, especially during the first 2 months of treatment.
- For itching in one specific area, called localized itching, apply a cream containing a corticosteroid or a numbing medicine, such as lidocaine 2% or cooling creams containing pramoxine, camphor, or menthol several times a day.
- For more generalized itching or itching that affects sleep, talk with your doctor about taking an antihistamine pill as needed.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.