

Skin Care During Radiation Therapy

Tips to help protect your skin

This handout is for people having radiation treatments. It offers tips to protect your skin and specific care tips for the area being treated.

How will radiation therapy affect my skin?

After 2 to 3 weeks of radiation treatment, your skin in the area being treated may:

- Look red, irritated, or sunburned
- Be dry and itchy or begin to peel

Closely watch all places with skin folds, like your neck, stomach, armpits, under your breast, or in your groin or crotch. The skin in these areas is more likely to become irritated.

Tips to Help Protect Your Skin

- Ask your radiation therapist what area of your skin may be affected by your radiation therapy.
- Bathe and shower as normal. But, do **not** use soaps that contain lotions, perfumes, or deodorants. Some brands to try are Ivory, Sensitive Skin Dove, Basis, or Neutrogena.
- Be extra gentle with your skin.
- Wear loose, soft clothing over the treated area.
- If you must shave in the treated area, use **only** an electric razor. Do not use straight-edge or safety razors.
- Protect your skin from the sun with a hat, scarf, or other clothing.
- Keep the treatment area clean and dry.
- Gently wash off all creams and lotions before each radiation treatment.



Be very gentle with your skin while you are having radiation treatments.

- Talk with your radiation nurse if you have any questions or problems with your skin.
- Tell your nurse when you notice changes in your skin.

Basic Care

- Do **not** use perfume, pre-shave or aftershave, deodorant, hair conditioner, or other styling products on the area being treated, unless your doctor or nurse says it is OK to do so.
- Do **not** use products that contain heavy metals like aluminum or zinc, including zinc oxide ointment.
- Do **not** use oil- or petroleum-based products such as Vaseline, baby oil, ointments, or vitamin E oil during your treatment.
- Do **not** apply any gel, lotion, or cream to your skin for 2 hours before each treatment.
- Do **not** use cornstarch or powder to replace deodorant or other powders. These products can lead to fungus on your skin.
- Do **not** apply heat or cold to your treated skin. Do not use heating pads, electric blankets, hot water bottles, or ice packs.
- Do **not** expose the treatment area to extreme heat or cold, such as very hot showers or baths, saunas or steam rooms, direct sunlight, or cold air direct from an air conditioner.
- Do **not** use adhesive tape or Band-Aids on the treatment area.
- Do **not** scrub your skin with a washcloth.
- Do **not** scratch, scrub, or rub your skin.
- Do **not** wear tight clothing over the treatment area.

Care for the Area Being Treated

Scalp

- Use baby shampoo or Neutrogena.
- Do **not** use conditioners, shampoo with conditioners, or styling products.
- Wear a hat when you are outside.

Face and Neck

- Do **not** wear or use makeup, moisturizer, sunscreen, perfume, or aftershave.
- Keep the area shaded from the sun.

Chest

- Do **not** use deodorant, unless your doctor says it is OK to do so.
- Protect the area from the sun with clothing.

Abdomen or Pelvis

- Do **not** use lotion, powder, or cream on the area.
- Clean your bottom area well after bowel movements.
- Allow your skin to air dry, or dry with a hair dryer on the cool setting at a short distance. Do **not** scrub or towel dry this area if your skin is irritated.

Arms, Hands, Fingers, Legs, Feet, or Toes

- Do **not** use lotion, cream, or sunscreen.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Wear shoes that do not squeeze your toes and feet.

Keep Your Skin Safe from the Sun

Your skin in the treatment area will be very sensitive to the sun for years after radiation treatment. You will need to treat your skin carefully. Sunburn may cause your skin to have the same reaction it did to the radiation.

Once your skin heals from treatment:

- Use sunscreen (30 SPF or higher) every time you go outside.
- Do **not** let the treatment area be in direct sun for long periods.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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