

Skin Care After Radiation Therapy

Protecting your skin after treatment ends

This handout is for people who have had radiation therapy. It gives tips on how to protect your skin and care for the treatment area.

When will my skin return to normal?

Side effects from radiation may continue or get worse for 7 to 10 days after treatment ends. In the treated area, your skin may:

- Look red, irritated, tanned, or sunburned
- Be dry and itchy
- Blister or peel

Areas where skin rubs against skin may get irritated more easily or peel after radiation therapy. These areas include your armpits, groin, and under your breasts.

Your skin should start to feel better a few weeks after your treatment ends.

Tips for Skin Care

- Keep using Aquaphor or calendula cream until your skin is no longer red. Then use a gentle, scent-free lotion for at least 6 weeks, or until your skin is fully healed.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Avoid using makeup, perfume, deodorant, or talcum powder in the treated area.
- Do **not** apply anything sticky to skin that was treated with radiation. This includes medical tape and Band-Aids.
- Use only mild soap until all side effects are gone. Do **not** scrub your skin. Wash gently and air dry or pat dry.
- Try saline soaks to clean and soothe your skin if it is dry or itchy, or you have blisters or peeling.



Once your skin is no longer red, use a gentle, scent-free lotion until your skin is fully healed.

How to Do a Saline Soak

- In a small bowl, combine 1 cup lukewarm tap water and ½ teaspoon Epsom salt.
- Soak a soft washcloth in the salty water.
- Gently wring out excess salty water.
- Place the washcloth on the affected skin for 20 minutes. If needed, re-wet the washcloth to keep it moist.
- Afterward, let your skin air dry.
- Repeat this 2 to 3 times a day until your skin has healed.

Protecting Your Treated Skin

Sunlight

Skin that has been treated with radiation is more sensitive to sunburn than untreated skin. Rarely, certain types of skin cancer can occur after radiation. To protect your skin:

- Avoid direct or prolonged sunlight to the treated area.
- Keep the area covered with clothing.
- Once side effects are gone, use a ‘broad-spectrum’ sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher.

Swimming

When your skin is no longer irritated, blistered, or peeling, you may go swimming. It is OK to take a bath.

Diet and Exercise

Keep eating a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. Good nutrition helps repair normal skin cells after radiation treatment.

If you felt tired during radiation, you may return to gentle exercise as your energy improves.

Long-Term Side Effects

Your skin may be darker after radiation, or you may have tiny broken veins in the treated area. These are long-term side effects of radiation. They are not harmful.

When to Call

Call your radiation team if you have questions, or if you have signs of infection (redness that gets worse, pain, swelling, or fevers) or other new skin problems. See phone numbers in the “Questions” box at left.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call Radiation Oncology if you have questions or concerns:

Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call **206.598.4100**

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call **206.598.6190** and ask to page the Radiation Oncology resident on call.