

## Physical Concerns – Dry, Itchy/Blister or Painful Skin

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/skin>

**Dry and itchy skin.** Dry or itchy skin may be common with cancer, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and stem cell transplants.

### To treat dry skin:

- Use a moisturizing cream at least twice a day and within 15 minutes of showering.
- Avoid products that irritate the skin. This includes soaps, detergents, and creams with fragrance.
- Avoid products that scratch or scrub the skin, such as sponges, bath scrubs, or loofahs.
- Shower and bathe with warm water. Hot water can dry the skin even more.
- When skin is very dry and cracked, use moisturizers such as Eucerin Advanced Repair Creme (not Lotion) or Aquaphor Healing Ointment – both of which come in a tub or pot. The lotion should be so thick that it cannot be squirted from a pump. This forms the best barrier for moisturizing and healing.

### To treat itchy skin:

- Avoid fragranced skin products.
- You may try Sarna lotion over the counter.
- Use frequent reapplication of above lotions & try to increase the moisture content of your skin.
- If these do not work, your doctor may prescribe a steroid cream
- Talk with your doctor about the itching. Your doctor may have you try oral medications called antihistamines.

**Sensitivity to light.** Some types of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and stem cell transplants may make the skin more sensitive to light. This is called photosensitivity. To protect sensitive skin from sunburns when outside:

- Cover up with clothing or a hat, especially from 10 AM to 4 PM.
- Use a sunscreen that is labeled as broad-spectrum (blocks UVA and UVB rays) and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Make sure to apply enough

to cover your entire body (1 ounce or 35 mL). Reapply every 2 hours or every hour if swimming or sweating.

**Radiation-related skin problems.** Radiation may affect healthy skin cells. This can cause the skin to peel, itch, or hurt. Skin damage from radiation treatment often starts after 1 or 2 weeks of treatment. Most often, it gets better a few weeks after treatment ends. If it becomes a problem, your doctor may change your radiation dose or schedule until the condition improves. Corticosteroid skin creams, such as mometasone (Elocon) cream, may help prevent skin changes from radiation. But, make sure you do not apply these creams within 4 hours of radiation treatment. Tell your doctor if you see any open sores or areas where the skin is moist. This may be a sign of an infection that needs treatment with oral antibiotics. Your doctor may also change the treatment for your cancer, or change the recommended lotions for your skin.

**Pressure ulcers or bed sores.** Pressure ulcers are caused by constant pressure on one area of the body. They often form on the heels of the feet, the tailbone, and other parts of the body with a thin layer of fat. To prevent and treat pressure ulcers and bed sores, try using an air or water pad that lies on top of your mattress. Or, if possible, use a low-air-loss bed or air-fluidized bed. Patients should change positioning every 2 hrs. It is important to seek treatment for pressure ulcers and bed sores to reduce pain and keep them from getting worse so be sure your medical team is aware.

**Malignant wounds.** When cancer breaks the skin down, it can cause a wound. Malignant wounds can easily become infected and be very painful or itchy. They are often very difficult to treat and might not heal. Talk with a member of your health care team if you have a malignant wound.

Adapted from Cancer.net: <https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/skin-conditions>

## Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Dry Skin](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Side Effects of Targeted Cancer Therapy Drugs](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Skin Conditions](#)
- [NCCN, Skin Rashes](#)
- [PubMed Health, PDQ® Patient Version, Pruritus](#)
- [NIH, NCI, Skin and Nail Changes](#)
- [Chemocare, Skin Reactions](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Caring for Your Skin During Cancer Treatment](#)

## Información Española

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Cambios en la piel y en las uñas](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Reacciones en la piel por la terapia dirigida y la inmunoterapia](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Afecciones cutáneas](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Problemas de la piel](#)