



Dry, Itchy/Blister or Painful Skin

Online version with active resource links at: [tp://cancer-help.me/skin](http://cancer-help.me/skin)

Skin issues can be a common side effect with cancer. It can be a result of the cancer itself, chemotherapy and / or radiation therapy, and stem cell transplants.

Here are tips to help you with cancer related skin issues.

Content adapted from websites below.

To treat dry skin:

- Use a moisturizing cream at least twice a day, apply within 15 minutes of bathing.
- Avoid products that irritate skin including soaps, detergents, creams with fragrance.
- Avoid products that scratch or scrub the skin such as loofahs or bath scrubs.
- Shower and bathe with warm water. Hot water can dry the skin even more.
- When skin is very dry and cracked, use tub contained, hand applied thick moisturizers such as Eucerin Advanced Repair Creme or Aquaphor Healing Ointment. 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.
- Reapply lotions frequently 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 10am - 4pm.
- 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. Apply to all uncovered skin. Reapply every 2 hours or every hour if swimming or sweating.

Radiation-related skin problems. Radiation can cause the skin to peel, itch, or hurt. Skin issues from radiation treatment often starts after 1 or 2 weeks of treatment. Most often, it gets better after treatment ends. If it becomes a problem, your doctor may change the radiation dose or schedule until the skin improves.

Corticosteroid skin creams, such as mometasone (Elocon) cream, may help prevent skin changes from radiation. 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. Talk with your doctor about your skin issues. They may be able to change the treatment for your cancer and/or prescribe recommended lotions for your skin.

Pressure ulcers or bed sores 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 let your care team know if you feel a sore spot forming and seek treatment reduce pain and keep them from getting worse.

Malignant wounds. When cancer itself breaks the skin down, it can cause a wound. These 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 wound from the cancer itself.

Resources for Additional Information:

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

Recursos en Español:

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