

Moving oncology care forward so that you can look forward to life's moments

General skin care advice for patients receiving radiation treatment










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Some people receiving radiation treatment may experience a skin reaction in the area being treated. Skin reactions vary from none to a sunburn-like reaction where the skin can become reddened, dry and sometimes itchy. In severe cases, blistering may occur. Not everyone will experience a skin reaction as it depends on the area being treated, the dose of radiation, the type of radiation and the number of treatments being given.

For most people, if a skin reaction is going to occur, it is not usually until after the second week of treatment. It reaches its peak about two weeks after treatment is completed. The reaction may take up to six weeks after treatment to completely resolve.

The radiotherapists administering treatment on the machines will keep a close eye on the condition of your skin during your treatment and can further advise you if a reaction appears. There are several things you can do to minimise skin reactions:

What to do

	Shower as normal using warm rather than hot water. Allow the water to gently run over the area being treated. Avoid prolonged soaking in the bath or swimming as this may increase any reaction that occurs.
	Use mild soap e.g. Dove or baby soap when washing but use sparingly in the area being treated.
	Do not rub the treated area. Friction aggravates the skin reaction. Dry it carefully by patting the area with a soft towel.
	You may use baby powder on the area being treated, preferably antiseptic powder.
	Avoid using deodorant or moisturisers on the area being treated.
	Do not apply anything to the treated area unless a radiotherapist, radiation oncologist or oncology nurse recommends it. This includes cosmetics, moisturisers, perfumes, shaving cream and sunscreen.
	Do not shave, wax or use hair removal cream in the area being treated.



If your skin becomes itchy try not to scratch as this may increase the reaction. Tell a radiotherapist or your oncologist. They can advise on or prescribe creams to relieve this.



Avoid exposing the treated area to direct sunlight. Cover up with a loose material scarf or clothing or stay in the shade. Even when you have finished your treatment, you must take care of the skin in the treated area, as it will always be more sensitive to the sun.



Avoid exposing the treated area to excessive heat or cold e.g. hot hair dryers, hot water bottles, ice packs, heat bags, cold winds or electric blankets.



Wear cotton next to your skin if possible. Natural fibres tend to be tolerated better than synthetics.



If you are taking any vitamin supplements, please discuss this with your oncologist to find out which supplements you can continue taking during treatment.



It is common for patients receiving radiation to feel more tired than usual. This is a normal side-effect of radiation treatment.



Your oncologist will see you up to once a week whilst you are on treatment. They may advise on, or prescribe creams and medications to help relieve symptoms.



If you are having chemotherapy treatment with your radiotherapy, please discuss this with your chemotherapy team before starting your radiotherapy treatment.



Do not hesitate to ask a radiotherapist or your radiation oncologist if you have any questions or are experiencing any problems.



Please inform your oncologist if you are taking any other treatments as these may reduce the effectiveness of your radiotherapy treatment or aggravate any side-effects.

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