

Department of Radiation Oncology

Skin Care

Introduction

Radiation passes through your skin to reach the treatment area. During your course of treatment, you may encounter reactions to the skin in this area. These reactions greatly resemble those that occur from exposure to the sun. These reactions are temporary. Depending upon the area being treated, the dose you are receiving, and your individual sensitivity, (e.g. “fair” skinned patients generally will see more of a reaction, or will see the reaction at an earlier point during the treatment) you may or may not see any type of reaction.

Generally, skin reactions are expected to occur later in your treatment. Normally these reactions will gradually improve several weeks following the completion of your course of radiation therapy. You may notice warmth, redness, skin darkening, itching, dryness or sensitivity of the skin that is within the treatment area. Please inform the radiation team if you develop weeping skin or an open sore.

Each patient undergoing radiation therapy will see the doctor at least once a week. This will give your physician time to see the progress of your treatments and make recommendations for modification of the treatment plan; if so, you will be clearly informed and reasons explained to you.

Skin Care during and after radiation treatments

- Keep treated area clean and dry. Do not wash off marks applied to the area of treatment. You may shower but do not soak in the bathtub.
- Use clean, luke warm water (never hot) to clean the area, patting dry very gently after washing.
- Do not apply heavy creams, lotions, powders, deodorant, perfumes, bath oils or body oils in or close to the area of radiation treatment and do not apply anything to the area of treatment prior to the treatment. These may interfere with healing or with radiation effects.
- Your physician may prescribe or suggest cream that can be applied daily **after** your treatment.
- Your therapist, nurse, and physicians will be checking your skin in the radiation area periodically during the course of treatment.
- Some mild itching, dryness, and tanning are normal in the skin of radiation treatments after the first two weeks of treatment. Particularly the areas covered by folds may have an enhanced skin reaction. These areas can be initially helped by sprinkling corn starch, baking soda, or oatmeal powder such as Aveeno.

- When face and neck are treated, men may find an electric razor less irritating. Do not use an aftershave with alcohol.
- Do not wear tight clothing with tight and constricting bands, particularly in the area of radiotherapy. Light weight cotton is best next to your skin. Avoid corduroy, wool or other scratchy fabrics directly on the skin.
- Avoid heating pads in the radiation therapy area. If you like to use cold packs, check with your radiation oncologist to see if that is appropriate to use in the treatment area.
- Avoid exposing the treated area to the sun. Use protective hats, clothing, and sunscreen on the rest of the body, but do not apply sunscreens on the treated area during the course of radiotherapy.
- Lubricate the rest of the body with water based moisturizers.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Keep indoor temperatures comfortably cool.
- Do not scratch the skin in the irradiated region. If you experience intense itching, use an ice cube to gently rub in that area or gently press that area for a few moments with an ice cube.
- Do not use medications and ointments used for ordinary burns or cuts in the area being treated without checking with your radiation team.
- In the last few weeks of radiation therapy when the skin reactions are commonly seen, if the skin shows more changes, your radiation oncologist will prescribe medication to soothe and comfort the skin involved. Most of the skin reactions gradually heal in one to three weeks whether or not prescription ointments are applied.

Please remember, if you have any questions or concerns, please ask your radiation team or call us at (315) 464-5276. We will be happy to answer your questions.

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