



# Getting Help for Skin Changes

Cancer and cancer treatment can cause skin changes like rashes, dry skin, color changes, and itching.

Skin changes are often side effects and part of your body's normal response to the treatment. If skin changes develop very suddenly while you are receiving a drug used to treat cancer, they could be a sign that you are allergic to that drug.

It is very important to tell your doctor or nurse about any skin changes you notice. If not treated, they can get worse and some might lead to infection.

## What common skin changes should I watch for?

**Rash** is a common side effect of some cancer treatments. The risk of getting a rash and how bad it is depends on the type of cancer and the type of treatment you get. Rashes can show up on the scalp, face, neck, chest, upper back, and sometimes on other parts of the body. They can itch, burn, sting, or be painful.

**Dry skin** is another side effect of some treatments. The skin can become very dry, scaly, rough, red, and sometimes painful. It may even crack open. This can happen on its own or with a rash. Dry skin can cause itching.

**Itching** can be caused by some cancers, cancer treatments, medications used as part of cancer treatment, dry skin, rash, or infection. Scratching your skin a lot can cause the skin to bleed or get infected, especially if the skin is broken.

**Hand-foot syndrome (HFS)** has been linked to many cancer treatment drugs. Pain, sensitivity, tingling, and numbness are early symptoms of HFS. Then, redness and swelling start on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. This redness looks a lot like sunburn and may blister. In bad cases, the blisters can open up and become sores. The skin also can become dry, peel, and crack.

**Skin color changes** can happen due to the side effects of some cancer treatments, tumor growth, or being in the sun. Some color changes may get better with time. Other color changes may last longer.

## What you can do to prevent or control skin changes

- Drink a lot of fluids if you've been told it's OK to do so.
- Use only mild soaps, body washes, shampoos, lotions, or creams that do not contain alcohol, perfume, or dye. Ask what products or brands you should use.
- Wash with warm or cool water, not hot water. Keep baths short, and pat yourself dry with a towel rather than rubbing your skin.
- Moisturize your skin during the day. The best time to do this is right after you bathe, while your skin is still damp.

- Shave less often, or stop shaving if your skin is sore. An electric razor can help keep you from getting cut when shaving.
- Do not use laundry detergents with strong perfumes.
- Stay out of the sun as much as possible. If you will be outside, use lip balm and sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30. Wear cotton clothing and a hat, too.

## What you can do to make skin changes better

- Do not treat your skin with over-the-counter medicines before talking to your health care team.
- Gel shoe inserts may help if the soles of your feet are tender.
- Some makeup brands can cover the rash without making it worse. Ask what products or brands you should use.
- If your skin is very dry, an oatmeal bath may be soothing.
- Try soft fabrics like cotton, and avoid fabrics that may irritate your skin, such as wool. Loose-fitting clothing often feels better than tight-fitting outfits.
- Do not spend time outside in very hot or very cold weather.
- If your doctor gives you medicines, use them the way they tell you to and start them right away.

The 2 most important things you can do are take good care of your skin and let your doctor know right away about any skin changes you may have.

## Talk to your health care team

Many skin changes can be treated, and there are things you can do to try to prevent them. Tell your cancer care team about the skin changes you're having. Let them know when you notice the changes, what you have trouble with, or things that make the changes worse or better. Skin changes can and should be treated as early as possible.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **www.cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.



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