Hand Foot Syndrome
During Cancer Therapy

Skin changes on palms of the hands and the bottom of the feet can happen with some cancer treatments. This is known as Hand Foot Syndrome (HFS). These skin changes can happen at any time during treatment. HFS is more likely to appear as treatment goes on and the effects of the medicines build up.

The palms of the hands and the bottom of the feet can become tingling or red (looks like sunburn). The palms of the hands and the bottom of the feet may also feel more sensitive and tender. Early treatment of HFS can help keep symptoms from getting worse.

Your doctor may need to stop your chemotherapy until the symptoms improve or change your chemotherapy dose for future treatments. This does not mean your chemotherapy will be less effective.

Signs of Hand Foot Syndrome

It is important to tell your health care team right away to prevent Hand Foot Syndrome from becoming a bigger problem. Call your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Flaking, cracking, dryness or peeling of the skin
- Small blisters, sores, or bleeding
- Tingling feeling, burning, numbness or itching
- Tenderness or pain
- Calluses

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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Things You Can Do to Help Prevent HFS

Here are ways to help prevent or reduce symptoms of HFS:

- Do not do activities that increase friction and heat to your hands and feet such as repeatedly rubbing your hands together, or walking on hot sand or pavement.
- Do not use hot tubs or saunas.
- Do not soak your feet in hot water or take a long hot shower or bath.
- Be careful with exercises or activities that increase pressure on your feet or hands such as clapping, jogging or weight lifting.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Protect your skin from the sun with clothing and sunscreen. **Use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher that has no fragrance and is labeled “hypoallergenic”**.
- Wear shoes and clean socks that fit well to prevent friction and skin irritation. Wear slippers at home.
- Do not stand for long periods of time.
- Do not cut, chop or use tools that can cause friction to the palms of your hands.
- Dishwashing gloves should not be worn because the rubber will hold heat against your palms.

Treatment for Hand Foot Syndrome

Here are some ways to treat the symptoms of HFS:

- Avoid rubbing the areas, but gently use moisturizing lotions and soap. Use soap and lotions that are free of perfumes or fragrance.
- Use products like Aquaphor®, Aveeno®, Bag Balm®, Udderly Smooth®, and Lubriderm®.
- After you apply the lotion, put on cotton gloves or cotton socks over your hands or feet. This will let the lotion work and keep your skin moisturized. It is very important to prevent the skin on your hands and feet from becoming too dry.
- If your feet become callused, a special lotion containing urea may be prescribed by your doctor.
- A cool bath or putting gel ice packs (or a package of frozen vegetables) on the area may help. **Ask your doctor before using cooling treatments.** Cooling the hands and feet decreases blood flow and may reduce symptoms.
- Elevate your hands and feet when possible.
- Talk with your doctor about the use of pain medicine to help treat symptoms.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.