

Skin Care for Head and Neck Radiation – Grade 3 Dermatitis

You may notice that your skin has continued to change during your radiation therapy. Your skin may be painful and red. More areas of your skin may be open and draining, and you may have mild bleeding in some areas. Radiation dermatitis is often rated as a “grade,” based on how your skin has changed during treatment. Your health care team has checked your skin and as of _____, you have **grade 3 dermatitis**.

How to Take Care of Your Skin

It is important to take special care of your skin now that it has started to change during radiation therapy.

Things you should do:

- Wash your skin each day with mild soap and warm water and pat dry. **Do not** rub or scrub your skin. Use mild, fragrance-free soap, such as Dove, Ivory, Neutrogena, Basis or Castile.
- **Do not** shave your face.
- Use Xeroform dressings with Lidocaine
- If you are able to, use saline soaks
- Wear clothes with soft fabrics (such as cotton) that do not rub or irritate your skin.

How to Change your Xeroform Dressing

Follow the directions below to change your Xeroform dressing. Change your dressing at least 1 time each day, unless told otherwise. Talk to a member of your health care team if you have questions about your dressing or how to care for your skin.

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

- Use a thin layer of Lidocaine gel to numb any areas that are sensitive or painful. Let the gel dry.
- Use an Aquaphor/Lidocaine mixture on any areas of your skin that will not be covered with a Xeroform dressing.
- Unwrap and unfold the yellow strip of Xeroform gauze. You may need to cut the gauze to fit the area. Gently press the gauze into place.
- Wrap the white gauze around your neck to hold the Xeroform dressing in place. Tape the end of the white gauze. Make sure to wrap the white gauze loosely enough so it does not choke you.

Do not let your Xeroform dressing dry out. If your dressings are drying out often, you may need to change your Xeroform dressing more than 1 time each day. It is important to soak off any dressing that has dried to your skin. Use warm water to wet the gauze until you are able to easily removed the dressing.

It is important to use Xeroform dressings until the areas are no longer draining, or until told otherwise by a member of your health care team.

How to Mix Aquaphor with Lidocaine

Follow the directions below to mix Aquaphor with Lidocaine. Use this mixture 3 to 4 times each day on any area of your skin that is **not open**.

Supplies:

- Aquaphor (10 grams or 0.35 ounces)
- Lidocaine Syringe (provided by a member of your health care team)
- Clean container with lid

Directions:

- Squeeze contents of small Aquaphor tube (10 grams) or 0.35 ounces of Aquaphor into a clean container.
- Add 1 Lidocaine syringe into the container.
- Mix Aquaphor and lidocaine together until the ointments looks white in color.
- When not in use, seal the lid on the container.

How to Use Saline Soaks

Follow the directions below to use saline soaks on your affected areas. You may use saline soaks 6 to 8 times each day, if needed.

- Remove Xeroform dressings. If needed, use warm water to wet the Xeroform dressing before removing it from your skin.
- Use saline to wet the gauze. The gauze should be wet, but not dripping.
- Place the saline gauze on all your affected areas. Let the saline gauze sit on these areas for 20 to 30 minutes.
- Remove the saline gauze and wash your skin with mild soap and warm water. Pat dry.
- Follow the directions above to re-apply your Xeroform dressing.