Cancer Therapy: Managing Side Effects - Radiation Therapy Skin Care

Radiation is used to treat many types of cancer. When radiation is given it passes through the skin. Skin problems are common for people who get radiation therapy. The radiation can cause skin changes to the treated area. The skin may become sensitive, irritated, and red or darker in color.

How To Take Care Of Your Skin

When you are getting radiation therapy you must take special care of your skin. The skin in the treated area needs to be protected from injury before, during or after radiation therapy.

Things you should do:

- Keep the skin clean and dry.
- Wash the skin with warm water and pat dry.
- Use mild soap such as Ivory®, unscented Dove®, Neutrogenia®, Basis®, Castile®.
- Wear cotton clothing. Choose clothes with soft fabrics.
- Cover your skin when you are in the sun. Wear a wide-brimmed hat for more protection.
- Tell your radiation doctor or nurse if you have dryness, itching, tenderness, redness or breakdown of the skin.
- Only use creams and lotions that your radiation doctor or nurse have said are okay for you to use.
Things you should not do:

- Do not wash off your radiation skin markings.
- Do not soak the treatment area.
- Do not shave the treated area.
- Do not use creams or lotions on the treated area unless your radiation doctor or nurse have said it is okay.
- Do not use deodorant that contains aluminum on the skin in the treated area.
- Do not use hot water bottles, heating pads or hot packs.
- Do not rub, scrub, or scratch your skin.
- Do not use ice packs.
- Do not use tape on the skin in the treated area.
- Do not use rectal thermometers or enemas if you get radiation therapy to the rectal area.
- Do not wear tight clothing.
- Do not wear rough fabrics (corduroy, wool).
- Do not wear underwire bras.
- Do not wear a prosthesis over the skin markings.
- Do not swim in salt water, pools, lakes or ponds.
- Do not soak in a hot tub.
- Do not expose the radiation area to direct sunlight. Keep your skin covered if you must sit or stand in sun.
More Important Information

Your skin will still be sensitive after radiation therapy. It takes time for the skin to recover from the radiation treatments. Keep doing the same skin care until your first appointment after treatment has ended or until your skin is completely healed (no more redness).

The skin in the radiation treated area should not be exposed to the sun for at least one year. If you are in the sun, sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) must be used. Do not put sunscreen on until your skin is completely healed and radiation treatments are done.

Where can I get more information and resources?

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. If you would like more information, ask for these patient education handouts:

- Fight Cancer-Related Fatigue with Good Nutrition
- Using Exercise to Fight Cancer-Related Fatigue
- Cancer Survivorship
- Cancer Internet Resources
- JamesCare for Life Programs - JamesCare for Life offers a wide range of programs to support patients, families and caregivers during and after cancer.

For more information about The James, we encourage you to visit our website at cancer.osu.edu