

DEALING WITH THE SIDE EFFECTS OF RADIATION THERAPY TREATMENTS TO THE SKIN

These are general guidelines only and are not intended to replace talking with your health care providers. Be sure to tell your doctor, nurse, or radiation therapist about any side effects that you notice.

Radiation used to treat skin cancer only treats the skin surface and the tissue that is a very little way underneath the skin. The side effects of radiation treatment vary from patient to patient. Following your treatment you may have a few mild changes in your skin that has been treated or you may have changes that cause you some minor problems. It usually takes about 4 – 6 weeks for your skin to heal.

Skin Changes

Your skin in the treatment area may become warm, itchy or pink (as if you have a mild sunburn). Later in the treatment, the skin may turn red, blistering or peeling (much like a burn). A scab may develop. This may happen while you are on treatment, soon after all your treatment finishes or up to 2 – 3 weeks after.

How you can manage these side effects:



- Avoid rubbing, scratching or scrubbing the treated area.
- Do not put medical tape or bandages on the treated area
- You can wash the area around where you were treated very gently with warm water and mild soap or shampoo (e.g. Dove, Ivory, baby shampoo), but try and avoid washing directly where the treatment was given. Pat your skin dry with a soft towel.



- Wear loose fitting and soft clothing against your treated skin (e.g. cotton).
- If the treated area is not on your face or neck and has not broken down you may dust the area with Johnson's baby powder or cornstarch
- Do not put anything very hot or cold (e.g. heating pad or ice pack) on treatment area.



- Avoid direct exposure of area to the sun and apply sunscreen with a minimum 15 SPF, if exposing your treated area to sun.
- Avoid exposing the treated area to strong winds.



- Do not apply aftershave, perfumes or make up to the treated area
- Do not shave in the treated area
- Do not apply tape directly on the treated area. If the skin becomes weepy leave it open to the air as much as possible to encourage healing. Use a non- stick dressing if going outside to avoid exposure to dust.
- Do not put any creams, lotions, liniments or alcohol on the treated area unless it was given to you by your Radiation Oncologist (Doctor)

What works for me:

Feelings during Radiation Treatment

Having cancer and going through treatment may be stressful. At some points during your radiation treatment, you may feel anxious, depressed, afraid, frustrated, angry, helpless or alone. It is normal to have these kinds of feelings. If you are fatigued as well, it can make it harder to cope with these feelings.

How you can manage this:

- Light exercise such as walking may help to relieve stress
- The use of relaxation techniques and meditation may help you to feel calmer
- Try to keep a regular sleeping pattern
- Talk about your feelings with someone you trust such as a family member, friend, spiritual advisor or health professional
- Consider joining a cancer support group to meet and talk to other people who are facing similar problems. To find a support group please contact a social worker at the Cancer Centre or your Canadian Cancer Society Office
- Talk to your radiation oncologist, nurse or radiation therapist. They can refer you to a healthcare professional that is trained specifically to help with these types of problems

What works for me:

