

Radiotherapy Skin Reactions: Information for patients receiving radiotherapy treatment

Introduction

This leaflet has been written to answer some of the questions you may have about skin care during your radiotherapy. We hope you will find this helpful. If you have any questions please talk to your treatment team.

During your radiotherapy and for a while afterwards, you may develop a skin reaction in the area being treated. You may notice:

- Your skin gradually becoming pinker or darker, depending on your skin colour.
- The skin may feel dry or tight and sore.
- A rash may also appear and feel itchy.
- Sometimes the skin may blister or peel. If this happens you will be given further help as you may need dressings.

A skin reaction may appear at any time but usually begins about 10 days after starting treatment.

How can I help myself?

It may not be possible to stop a skin reaction but by following this advice you may feel more comfortable. This only applies to the skin in the area being treated.

- Wash the skin gently with soap and water; gently pat dry.

- Wear loose fitting, natural fibre clothing next to the skin. For example, a cotton T-shirt.
- Avoid rubbing the area.
- Avoid extremes of temperature such as heating and cooling pads.
- Avoid/reduce shaving if possible, unless advised differently by your team.
- Avoid wax/creams for hair removal.
- Avoid sticky tape on the area (such as Elastoplast™ or Micropore™).

What to do if your skin breaks/blisters

If your skin breaks/blisters you should stop using moisturiser. Your treatment team will advise you further.

- Avoid using products containing alcohol on the skin. This includes make up, hair dye, perfumes and aftershave.
- You may use deodorant unless it irritates your skin. Please stop if the skin breaks.
- You may swim if your skin isn't broken. Shower after swimming to wash off the chlorine and apply your moisturiser. Please stop swimming if it irritates your skin.
- Avoid sun exposure and protect the area from direct sunlight. You can wear a brimmed hat and/or cover up with clothing. Be careful in the sun for at least a year after you have finished. Use a sunscreen with a minimum UVB sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 and UVA protection as your skin will be more sensitive.
- Your treatment team will let you know if this advice changes during treatment.



What can affect my skin reaction?

- Having treatment to areas where there are skin folds can make your skin reaction worse. This includes the groin, breast, buttocks or armpit because they can be warm, moist and rub together causing friction.
- Treatment to the head and neck area may mean a worse skin reaction.
- Having chemotherapy alongside radiotherapy can make your skin reaction worse.
- Smoking can make your skin reaction worse – if you need help to stop please ask for advice.
- A skin reaction is more likely if you are overweight due to more skin folds.

Your treatment team will talk to you about your usual daily skin care routine. They will let you know if any changes are advised. Please talk to them about any worries you have.

It may also help to keep up a good fluid intake and eat a nutritionally well-balanced diet.

After your treatment has finished, your skin will continue to be more sensitive. Your reaction may worsen for the next 7-10 days before starting to improve. Most patients find their skin has healed by about 4 weeks after treatment finishes. If the skin has broken, healing may take longer than this.

If you are unsure about this advice or have any questions, please talk to your treatment team.

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What happens after your course of Radiotherapy

After your course of Radiotherapy finishes you will receive a follow up appointment with your oncologist (you will be given an approximate date by the radiographers).

A radiographer will give you an information leaflet about what you need to do upon completion of your course of radiotherapy.

Radiotherapy department contact details

Telephone: 01225 824853

Monday-Friday 8am-3:30pm

Website: www.ruh.nhs.uk/patients/services/radiotherapy

Other useful phone numbers/websites

Bath RUH cancer information centre: (01225) 82 4049

Macmillan: www.macmillan.org.uk
08088 080000

Life after cancer PocketMedic® have produced some patient information videos, available at www.medic.video/swe15-cancer (Life after cancer)

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG
01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.