

Radiation Treatment Skin Care

Skin reactions from radiation treatment often appear after two weeks of therapy. Common skin reactions include redness, dry, flaky skin (dry reaction), open, weeping skin (moist reaction) and itching or discomfort.

Report any symptoms including skin reactions to your doctor or nurse.

Radiation treatment causes side effects to your skin that are similar to those caused by sun damage, such as dryness, mild redness or tanning, noticeable redness or tanning and blistering.

Although every patient is different, side effects usually occur about one quarter of the way through treatment. Side effects are usually not related to your tendency to sunburn. The information below will help you care for your skin. Follow these directions, unless otherwise directed by your doctor.

Do not apply any skin care products to the treatment site three hours before treatment as this may interfere with radiation delivery.

General Skin Care

Do not begin a skin care routine or use products unless your doctor recommends or approves it.

Aquaphor® is often recommended to patients for general skin care. (Your health care team will give you a sample and a coupon for Aquaphor). If your skin becomes dry or itches and your doctor approves, apply the product to the treatment areas after radiation. Do not apply the product to the treatment marking lines. It is important not to have thick creams on the skin at the time of treatment.

Pure aloe gel (alcohol free) may also be used as above.

If the Aquaphor does not relieve itching, over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream can help. Apply the hydrocortisone cream first and then the Aquaphor.

If skin appears sunburned (red or tan) your team may give you non-adherent medicated dressings to place over the affected areas. A member of your medical team will show you how to apply these.

Avoid harsh soaps that have a lot of fragrance, instead use fragrance-free soaps with moisturizers, such as Dove®.

Help prevent skin irritation by avoiding tight clothes or underwire bras, especially once you begin to have symptoms.

Aquaphor®

Your radiation oncology nurse will give you instructions on how to take care of your skin. You will receive Aquaphor, a petroleum-based cream. Begin using Aquaphor as soon as you are told by the radiation oncology nurse. Use Aquaphor only if you are instructed to do so by your doctor or nurse.

Put a small amount of the Aquaphor in the palm of your hand. Rub until the cream is warm and thin. Apply the Aquaphor lightly to the treated area with your fingertips.

Do not apply the Aquaphor over any markings the therapist may have drawn on your skin.

Apply Aquaphor after your last treatment of the day and before you go to sleep at night.

Silvadene® Cream

Silvadene is an antibacterial cream applied to moist, damaged skin as directed by your radiation oncology doctor or nurse. Tell your nurse if you are allergic to sulfa drugs.

Aloe Gel

A small amount of aloe gel may be applied lightly to the treated area as directed by your radiation team. The product should state that it is “pure” aloe gel and should be alcohol free.