

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

16. Dry, itchy or Sore Skin

Dry, itchy or sore skin is a common symptom of cancer and may affect any area of the body. It could be a symptom of lymphoedema. Other causes include chemicals released by the cancer, medication, jaundice or kidney problems. Minor skin problems are extremely common when a patient is having chemotherapy.

How can I manage my skin problem?

It's important NOT to use any creams or dressings unless they have been prescribed or recommended by a doctor, specialist nurse or radiographer. If you are having radiotherapy you should follow the skin care advice given by your radiographer.

- Using a moisturiser, such as aqueous cream, twice a day can help with dry skin. Other suitable skin creams can be prescribed by a doctor. Store any creams in the fridge so that it will feel soothing on application.
- If the skin is broken and there is the possibility of infection (e.g. high temperature, redness of the skin, feeling unwell or loss of appetite) antibiotics might be needed so please contact **Acute Oncology Team** based on the Seamoor Unit
- Avoid sunburn to the areas of skin most affected. If you are in the sun use a very high factor sun cream.
- Use anti-fungal powder to prevent athlete's foot if the feet are affected.
- For acne, keep face clean and use over-the-counter face soaps and creams.
- Itchiness and dryness of the skin can be soothed with corn starch, and by avoiding long, hot baths.
- Moisturise immediately after washing whilst skin is still moist. Avoid any products that contain alcohol in them. A colloidal oatmeal bath helps soothe skin complaints (recipes can be found online for a homemade version). Diphenhydramine hydrochloride (trade name Benadryl) is also extremely beneficial for pruritis (an itch or a sensation that makes a person want to scratch).
- Keeping as cool as possible will reduce itchiness, so wear loose cotton clothes to allow air to circulate over the skin. At night choose light cotton bedcovers and keep the bedroom as cool as possible.
- Keep nails short and clean to avoid causing any skin damage when scratching.
- Darkening of the skin all along the vein can occur when certain anticancer drugs are given intravenously. This is more common with individuals who have very dark skin. Makeup to cover the darkening can be used but can be time consuming. Changes in darkened skin will fade within a few months after treatment ends.
- After radiotherapy some patients can experience 'radiation recall' whereby skin that has been exposed to radiation treatment turns red (this can range from light to very bright red). This 'radiation recall' can resemble that of a burn and can blister and peel. It can last from a few hours to days and can be soothed by placing a cool wet compress over the affected area and wearing soft, non-irritating fabrics to avoid aggravation. To prevent this you should use a high factor sun block it out in the sun. Women who have received radiation therapy for breast cancer following lumpectomy have suggested that cotton bras are the most comfortable to wear.
- Some relaxation techniques can help in reducing itchiness

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- Resources/Information

Local Resources:

<p>Lymphoedema Service Barnstaple Health Centre, Vicarage Street, Barnstaple EX32 7BH By appointment only Monday - Friday 08:30 am— 4:30 pm</p>	<p>The Lymphoedema service is a nurse-led service providing individualised care and encouraging self-management through specialised treatment and education. The aim is to allow the individual to lead an independent life so far as possible. Referrals can be made by your GP, consultant or CNS</p>
<p>Other:</p>	<p>GP, oncology doctor, Clinical Nurse Specialist</p>

National Resources:

<p>The Lymphoedema Support Network(LSN) www.lymphoedema.org Hotline 020 7351 4480 Mon-Fri 09.30-16.30hrs</p>	<p>National charity which provides information and support to people living with lymphoedema. Email: admin@lsn.org.uk</p>
<p>NHS UK www.nhs.uk/conditions/itchy-skin www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema/treatment/</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top tips on how to help stop itchy skin and avoid damage from scratching • Useful information and practical advice on primary and secondary lymphoedema
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 7 days a week 8:00am—8:00pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p>Macmillan on-line Community</p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open Monday to Friday - 08:00am – 6:00pm Saturday -11:00am – 5:00pm</p>

Other Resources :

<p>Macmillan Booklets:</p>	<p>Cancer and Complementary Therapies MAC11645</p>
	<p>Managing Cancer Pain MAC11670</p>
	<p>Managing the Symptoms of Cancer MAC11671</p>