

Skin Care While Receiving Radiation Therapy

The purpose of this information is to prepare you for skin changes you may see from your radiation treatments and how to care for the skin in the area of treatment.

General Information

- When radiation is given, the beam passes through the skin. The closer the radiation is delivered to the skin, the more likely the skin will be irritated. Skin fold areas (ie., neck, underarms, under breast, groin, and overlapping skin) are more prone to skin breakdown.
- Skin reactions vary but are usually cumulative and may be noticeable after a few weeks of treatment. Early skin changes may be more pronounced in patients who have received recent chemotherapy. The skin changes are temporary and will generally improve after radiation is complete. Only the skin in the area being treated is affected the radiation. The most common reactions are listed below in the order they usually occur:
 - Faint to moderate redness
 - Dry, flaky skin with minor irritation and itching
 - Bright redness with some open, moist areas associated with tenderness
 - There may be some associated swelling or hair loss in the treated area

Skin Care

- Keep the skin clean and dry. Wash the skin in the treatment area with mild soap (i.e., *Dove*, *Basis*, *Neutrogena*, and *Cetaphil*) and **warm** water. Hot water may increase itching and irritation associated with the skin reaction. Use hands to bathe and avoid using a washcloth or vigorous scrubbing to minimize friction. Rinse well and pat skin dry.
- If your scalp is in the treated area, use a mild shampoo, such as baby shampoo. Avoid the uses of blow dryers, curling irons or hot curlers.
- Avoid the use of perfumes, cosmetics, powder and antiperspirants in the radiated field. Alternatives for deodorant include *Crystal* and *Tom's of Maine* (look for any natural deodorant without aluminum at pharmacy or health food store).
- Wear loose-fitting, cotton clothing over sensitive skin. Women who are receiving radiation to the chest should avoid wearing a bra, or if necessary, wear a cotton sports bra or camisole.
- Do not shave using a razor in the area of treatment, an electric shaver may be better tolerated in the head and neck or underarm area.
- Protect the treated skin from direct sun exposure, wearing protective clothing or hat when possible.
- Avoid work or exercise that may cause excessive perspiration during treatment.
- If you swim in saltwater or chlorinated pools, rinse off as quickly as possible. If you have any open areas of the skin, please avoid swimming. Do not use hot tubs during radiation treatment.
- Do not apply tape (except paper tape) or bandages to affected skin. Consult with staff if dressing or adhesives necessary.
- Avoid the use of ice packs or heat such as hot water bottles or heating pads to treat area.
- Wash clothes, using only mild detergents such as Ivory or Dreft if skin irritation is severe.

CONTINUE ON OTHER SIDE

Products

- Clinical evidence suggest that initial use of a plain, non-scented, lanolin-free cream is helpful.
- Start using recommended OTC moisturizing creams or ointments at the initiation of treatment. Apply a thin layer to treated area 2-3 times a day during treatment. Avoid application of moisturizer at least **4 hours** before scheduled treatment time. Some frequently recommended moisturizers that are available at most pharmacies include:
 - Aquaphor
 - Lubriderm
 - Keri Lotion
 - Aloe Vera –100% aloe is preferable. Some people have an allergy to aloe.

Other products that are available on-line or by phone include:

- Miaderm Radiation Relief Lotion: Calendula, Aloe, Vitamin E, Hyaluronate, Marine Collagen: (1-877-642-7727) or www.miaderm.com, Price: \$23.99 with add. shipping (4 oz.)
- RadX: Radiation Therapy Formulation with Aloe & Lidocaine: (1-800-728-7873) or www.solrx.com, Price: \$20.00 with add. Shipping (2 oz.)
- Jeans Cream: Aloe & Vitamin E: www.jeanscream.com, Price: \$21.50 (2 oz.), \$45.00 (7 oz.)

If you have a good *prescription* drug plan, moisturizers for radiation dermatitis that can be prescribed include:

- Biafene Topical Emulsion – Apply three times per day, #45 gm or #90 gm tube
- Xclair Cream – Apply three times per day, #75ml tube
- Hylira Hydration Lotion – Apply 2-3 times per day, #1,000 gm or #340 gm bottle

If a rash or itching develops in the treatment field, the staff may recommend:

- 1% Hydrocortisone
- 2.5% Hydrocortisone, *by prescription only* (3 oz.)

For more severe skin reactions prescription hydrogels, a prescription burn cream, antibiotic ointment and skin soaks may be recommended. These include:

- Silvadene 1%, sulfa antibiotic cream *by prescription only* (50gm, 85gm, 400gm),
- Domeboro's Soaks *OTC* – 12 packets/box-mix 1 packet in 16 oz. water, soak soft cloth or gauze and apply compress to affected area for 15-30 minutes 3 times a day.
- MPM Regenecare HA, *by prescription only* (3 oz.) – Aloe, Hyaluronic acid (HA), Lidocaine 2%
- Hydrogels: Carrington Radiagel (3 oz), Radiaplex Rx Gel (6 oz)

- Antibiotic Ointments: (OTC) Neosporin, Polysporin, Bacitracin, Triple Antibiotic Ointment, and (Rx) Bactroban (mupirocin) 2%, 22 gm tube