

Medical Oncology

Skin Care Information Sheet

Skin Care

Some chemotherapy and immunotherapy medicines are known to have side effects that affect the skin. Your skin may become very dry. It may become red and develop “acne-like” blemishes. These are due to the direct effect of the drug on the rapidly reproducing cells that form your skin. There are several things you can do to reduce these side effects:

Cleansing – Use a “soap less” skin cleanser, especially on your face and chest. This minimizes drying of the skin. Examples: Eucerin®, Cetaphil®, Neutrogena® and Vanicream™ skin cream products. Look for products that are fragrance-free and free of dyes (if possible).

Creams and ointments versus lotions – Creams and ointments are best because these will retain most of the moisture in your skin.

Moisturizing Creams – Moisturizing creams help rehydrate the skin. Examples: Eucerin, Cetaphil®, CeraVe®, Neutrogena® Norwegian Formula Hand Cream, Aveeno®, and Bag Balm®. Vanicream is another type of cream that is good for those who have sensitive skin. Look for products that are fragrance-free and free of dyes (if possible).

Sunscreen – Sun exposure may worsen skin reactions. Use sunscreen (minimal SPF 15) liberally, cover exposed areas and wear hats to limit exposure. Sunscreens that have the ingredient listed as titanium dioxide or zinc oxide are the best in protecting the skin. Another type of sunscreen that is very good for protection is Neutrogena with Helioplex and Aveeno with Active Barrier Complex. Wearing long sleeved shirts and pants can also be helpful. Use lip balm. Avoid tanning beds.

Very thick moisturizers – are used for the cracks on heels or in the fingertips; the best way to prevent or treat these is by using a very thick moisturizer, such as Desitin® or Desitin® Maximum Strength, Udderly Smooth® Extra Cream or A&D® Ointment is also effective. These need to be applied up to four times a day and at night. Ideally, one would cover with socks or cotton gloves so the water in the skin is retained and the cracks are allowed to heal.

Detergents – Use fragrance-free detergents. Ones that say “free” or “clear” on the box or those with a mild scent are best.

Shave less often.

Bathing – Take showers or baths with warm water instead of hot water. Dry your skin by patting it instead of rubbing the skin.

Other treatments may be prescribed by your physician for your skin condition, if needed. Some types of chemotherapy may cause your nails to become dark, turn yellow, or become brittle and cracked. Sometimes your nails will loosen and fall off, but new nails will grow back.

Nail Care

- Keep your nails clean and cut short.
- Wear gloves when you wash the dishes, work in the garden or clean the house.
- Moisturize nails.

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- Avoid use of artificial nails.
- Avoid manicures and pedicures if your nails are affected by treatments.
- Avoid tight fitting shoes.
- Do not cut or push cuticle back or bite your nails.
- Use dark nail polish to help hide any discoloration, but do not change your polish frequently because nail polish removers are harsh.

Hand-Foot Syndrome: Abnormal pain, swelling, redness in hands or feet.

- Avoid injury to hands and feet.
- Avoid tight fitting shoes and repetitive rubbing.
- Avoid pressure or prolonged heat to hands and feet.
- Wear cotton or leather gloves when using your hands for sports, hobbies or working.
- Wear thick cotton socks for walking.
- Do not walk barefoot; use soft slippers or shoes.
- Avoid standing for long periods of time.
- Use moleskin or Molefoam® padding for your feet when areas do rub against shoes.
- Apply moisturizer creams liberally and frequently to hands and feet.

Acne-like rash: flat or raised reddened area that looks like pimples.

- It is important to moisturize rash (See section on skin care).
- This rash is more commonly located on the scalp, head, face, chest, and back.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Protect your skin from the sun. When outside, always use sunscreen (SPF 15 and higher), lip balm or wear long sleeved shirt, pants, and hat with a wide brim. (See section on skin care).
- Avoid tanning beds.

See the pictures 1-10 on page 36 and 37 in the Chemotherapy/Immunotherapy Patient guide.

Call Your Doctor or Nurse if:

- You develop a dry, itchy, red or painful rash.
- Nails become cracked, dark, or yellow or you see pus.
- Hands or feet have abnormal pain, swelling or redness.

See the *Chemotherapy and Immunotherapy Patient Guide* book for more information.

If you have questions or concerns, please call your care team at:
Bronson Cancer Center – Battle Creek 269-245-8660
Bronson Cancer Center – Kalamazoo 269-286-7170