



## Skin Changes and Radiation Therapy

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Skin cells grow and divide rapidly. During treatment, radiation passes through the skin in the treatment area. Skin changes can occur as radiation damages rapidly dividing cells in the treatment area. The extent of the skin reaction varies from person to person and may be affected by:

- skin color (fair-haired, light-eyed people are more sensitive)
- chemotherapy or radiation
- location of treatment field

**Watch for:** *Short-term changes*

- Dryness and flaking
- Skin color changes (darkening of veins, pink or redness)
- Slight swelling
- Sensitivity to touch

*Long-term changes*

- Thin and dry skin
- Darker skin color
- Tightness
- Swelling

**Call your nurse or doctor immediately if you have**

- Any skin changes that occur in the radiation treatment areas
- Any new or unexpected rashes, skin or nail changes

**Hygiene  
precautions:**

- **Do not wash off marks in the treatment area.**
- Gently cleanse skin with warm water. Use only mild, nonperfumed, nondeodorant soap (such as Dove, Basis, Aveeno). Use a soft cloth and a gentle patting motion.
- Avoid shaving hair in the treatment field. Use an electric razor if shaving is necessary.
- Use only moisturizing lotion or cream prescribed by your nurse or doctor.
- Wash off all lotions or creams before your radiation treatment.
- Avoid using deodorants, perfumes, or cosmetics in the treatment area.
- Wear loose-fitting, 100 percent cotton clothing over the treatment area.
- Use gentle detergents to wash the clothing that comes in contact with skin in the treatment area.
- Avoid injury to skin in the treatment area. This includes extremes of hot and cold temperatures, rubbing, and scratching.
- Avoid using tape or Band-Aids in the treatment field.
- If itching is present, avoid rubbing, scratching, or massaging skin in the treatment area.
- Avoid direct sunlight. Wear tightly woven cotton clothing over the treatment area and use a sunscreen with an SPF rating of 15 or more when outdoors.
- Avoid swimming in salt or chlorinated water during treatment and for several months following treatment.

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Living with Cancer Chemotherapy Series  
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2001

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