Radiation Therapy to the Skin

The Ottawa Hospital Cancer Centre
Disclaimer
This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital Cancer Centre. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified health-care provider. Please consult your health-care provider who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.
Your doctor has prescribed radiation therapy to your skin. You will be having radiation treatments five days a week. Radiation therapists will be administering your daily treatments. You may also see the radiation oncology nurse during your treatment and your radiation oncologist will see you weekly.

If you have concerns or questions, please discuss them with your radiation therapy team. They are here to help you in the following weeks.

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<th>Smoking</th>
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<td>Patients are encouraged to stop smoking or at least not to smoke during treatment. Smoking increases side effects and decreases the effectiveness of your treatment. If you are having difficulties stopping smoking please talk to your health care team.</td>
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Please note that the following is a list of acute, or short-term, temporary reactions to your radiation treatment. Please discuss possible long-term effects of your treatment with your radiation oncologist.

**Possible Side-Effects**

**Skin Reactions**

You may develop a skin reaction in the area being treated with radiation. This may occur after the first 2-3 weeks of treatment. You may experience discomfort, itchiness, tenderness, swelling, and reddening. Your radiation therapy team will explain which areas on your skin may be affected. The severity of the reaction is dependent upon your skin type (sensitivity to radiation), the area being treated, the dose and the number of treatments.
prescribed. Use the following guidelines to minimize any skin reaction you may experience:

**Management**  
(Applies to treatment area only)

The guidelines below are to be used beginning on the first day of your radiation treatment and are to be continued until your skin has healed completely.

No lotions, creams or sunscreens may be used on the treatment area during treatments. During treatment **avoid washing** the treated area. If it gets wet while showering, gently pat dry.

**Other General Guidelines**

- **Irritants:** Avoid any irritants such as perfumes, colognes, body sprays and aftershave lotions etc.
- **Scratching:** Do not scratch itchy skin within the treatment area.
- **Temperatures:** Avoid exposing irradiated skin to temperature extremes (ice packs, heating pads, hot/cold/wet compresses, saunas and hot tubs, etc.).
- **Sun and wind exposure:** Protect treated area from direct sunlight and wind exposure. Do not use sunscreen during radiation treatments on the area being treated and for 2 weeks after the completion of treatment. Once the skin has healed a sunscreen, with SPF of 30 or higher, should always be applied to the treated area due to permanent sensitivity to the sun.
- **Cover your head:** If your head is being treated, wear a hat, scarf or wig to protect your head from the sun, wind and cold.
- **Bandages:** Avoid Band Aid® type bandages and adhesive tapes on treated skin.
End of Treatment Guidelines

• **Lukewarm water soaks:** If the area is painful near the end of treatment lukewarm water soaks can be used. Air dry or pat the area very gently when done.

• **Medication:** After the completion of your radiation treatments a prescription steroid cream may be given to you by your radiation oncologist if they feel it is necessary. Use as prescribed and only until the area heals.

• **Scab care:** Any ulcerated areas should be left to scab over and **the scab should not be touched until it falls off naturally.**

• **Infection:** If you are concerned that there are signs or symptoms of infection in the treatment area, you should be evaluated by a physician, preferably your radiation oncologist. If you live outside of Ottawa you could visit with your family doctor, your dermatologist or your surgeon if applicable.

• **Moisturize:** When the radiation reaction has subsided a gentle moisturizing lotion or cream can be used on the area. The lotion or cream should contain:
  - **No** scents or perfumes
  - **No** Lanolin

• **Sunscreen:** Once the skin has healed a sunscreen, with SPF of 30 or higher, should always be applied to the treated area due to permanent sensitivity to the sun.
Your skin reaction will be monitored by your radiation therapy team. Your skin reaction may increase in severity 1-2 weeks following treatments. You are advised to follow all skin care guidelines listed above for 2 weeks following the end of your radiation treatments or until your skin has healed completely. You can contact your radiation oncology nurse (613-737-7700 ext. ) in the first two weeks after treatment if you are concerned with the condition of your skin. Following this two weeks period after the end of treatment, you are to contact your patient designated nurse with any questions related to side effects. Contact information will be provided on your last day of treatment.

Radiation Induced Fatigue

You may experience some level of fatigue during the course of your treatment. Fatigue is the feeling of being mentally and/or physically tired. You may already be feeling tired as it is one of the most common symptoms associated with cancer. This lack of energy can get in the way of your normal functioning making it harder to concentrate and bringing down your mood. Some patients may feel even more tired in the first two weeks following their radiation treatments. It may take a few weeks to return to how you felt before the treatments.

Management

• **Eating:** Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
• **Set priorities.** Continue with regular daily activities, however, only perform most important tasks if fatigue increases.
• **Rest:** Take short naps during the day if required. Aim to get the majority of your sleep at night.
• **Stay active:** Physical activity and exercise can help to minimize the effects of fatigue. Take a brisk 20-30min walk daily if you are able.

Let your radiation therapy team know if you are feeling very fatigued, sleepy, depressed or are having difficulty performing everyday tasks. Your radiation therapy team can direct you to other resources as required.

**OTHER SIDE EFFECTS**

• If you experience side effects other than those listed in this pamphlet, please notify your radiation therapy team and you will be referred to the appropriate health professional.

Notes