

# SKIN CARE DURING CHEMOTHERAPY



What you need to know to safely  
take care of your skin during treatment



## **Why is good skin care important during chemotherapy?**

Your skin is one of the areas of your body that is most commonly affected by cancer treatment. It is important to take extra care of your skin to prevent possible skin changes from getting worse.

Most patients develop dry, sensitive and irritated skin, especially when starting chemotherapy. Changes in your nails are also common. The good news is that possible skin reactions are usually temporary and there are steps you can take every day to protect your skin.

## **How will the information in this booklet help me better take care of my skin during treatment? It will help you:**

- Understand how chemotherapy can affect your skin.
- Learn different ways to protect your skin.
- Know what skin changes you need to tell your doctor about right away.

## How can chemotherapy affect your skin?

The type and dose of medications you get can cause different skin reactions.

- Your skin can become more dry or flaky.
- Your skin may become more sensitive or easily irritated during treatment.
- You may get a rash from the treatment itself or it may make you more sensitive to products you have used before.
- Some medications can cause an acne-like reaction; you can get pimples or white heads.
- Changes in your skin color can happen such as redness or darkening.



- Changes in your nails may include: darkening, yellowing, brittleness, cracking, lines and possible loss of nails.



If you have a history of ongoing skin problems such as eczema or psoriasis, let your doctor know so that you can be checked by a dermatologist.



- A list of medications and common skin reactions can be found on pages 13, 14 and 15.

## How can I take better care of my skin during chemotherapy?

Taking good care of your skin is especially important when starting chemotherapy. Starting early will be key in preventing skin reactions from getting worse. Once you begin treatment, write down any skin reactions you notice and let your doctor know about these changes so that you can work together in taking care of them.

### Things you should avoid while caring for your skin during chemotherapy are:

- Soaps, shampoos, detergents and lotions that have fragrances, dyes and/or preservatives. These types of products are very likely to cause itching and a rash.
- “Gel nail” manicures - this type of polish needs UV exposure to harden the polish and can cause major loss of nails, as well as rash and risk of skin cancer.
- Anything you think you might be allergic to such as plants, pets, harsh chemicals in household cleaning products, rubber gloves, jewelry, grass and pollen, artificial fingernails and adhesives.
- Being in the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when UV rays are the most intense. Patients on docetaxel and paclitaxel medication should be especially careful to stay out of direct sunlight.

## What can you do every day to take care of your skin?

- Use a moisturizing product daily or more often if your skin is dry. Plain 100 percent petroleum (Vaseline) is the best for patients with a history of sensitive skin or allergies. If you cannot tolerate Vaseline, Aquafor® is another option.
- If you prefer a cream, use a fragrance and dye free product in a tub, not a pump bottle. The lotion in pumps are mostly water and will not work as well.
- The best time to apply your moisturising product is immediately after you shower or bathe while your skin is still moist.



## When showering and bathing:

- Minimize the use of soap. Use it where needed (face, armpits, groin, hands, feet) rather than extensively over your whole body. Rinsing off with warm water is sufficient for most patients.
- Only use fragrance and dye free soaps, especially if you have sensitive skin.
- Take showers or short, cool baths instead of long, hot baths.
- If you develop a rash, notify your doctor right away. The sooner its checked and diagnosed, the easier it is to treat.





## Protect your skin from the sun:

- Apply broad spectrum SPF 50+ sunscreen to skin daily. Reapply every 60 to 90 minutes while in the sun.
- Be generous when applying sunscreen. Use about the amount you can hold in your palm to fully cover all exposed areas on your body (arms, legs, neck, hands, feet and face).
- If you have thinning hair, apply sunscreen to your scalp as well.
- To protect your lips, apply lip balm with SPF of at least 15.



- Protect your skin from the sun every time you go outside, even when its cloudy.
- Check the expiration date on the sunscreen to be sure it will still effectively protect you from the rays of the sun. Most sunscreen products are good for at least two to three years.
- Wear a wide brimmed hat with at least a three inch brim all the way around — a baseball cap does not give you enough protection.
- Wear sun protective clothing (SPF 50) when you are outdoors.



## When should I contact my health care team about skin reactions?

- Unexplained or worsening skin rash.
- Itching, pain or other troubling symptoms accompanying a rash.
- Rash affecting your mouth or nose.
- Any blistering, peeling, open areas in the skin.
- If you suspect infection of the skin or nails.
- Swelling, chest pain or difficulty breathing (signs of an allergic reaction). Get help right away and notify your doctor.
- Patients on pertuzumab and trastuzumab medication may have more risk of infection of the skin and nails. If you develop any redness, pain or itching of the skin, please notify your doctor immediately.

Contact your health care team  
for any questions or concerns.

Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
(626) 256-HOPE (4673)

After hours and on weekends, call the  
Nurse Triage Center at (626) 471-7133

After reading through this booklet, it is important to  
keep talking to your doctor and nurse about how to best  
take care of your skin during treatment.

## Chemotherapy medications and common skin changes

Talk to your doctor about how you can best care for your skin.

**Paclitaxel**  
**Nab-Paclitaxel**  
**Docetaxel**  
**Cabazitaxel**

- Hair thinning and loss
- Nail thinning, splitting, infection, deep lines, darkening
- Do not get “Gel Nail” manicures; this can cause sudden loss of nails.
- Hand rash and Hand Foot Syndrome (palms and soles become red, and there can be some peeling of the skin)
- Sun sensitivity
- Rarely, scleroderma-like reaction (usually visible by scar-like patches forming on the skin)

**Panitumumab**  
**Afatinib**  
**Erlotinib**  
**Cetuximab**

- A rash is very common
- Redness and itching, acne-like rash affecting face, chest and back
- Nail changes and pain
- Severe dryness and cracking of the skin
- Mouth and tongue sores
- Skin infections

**Vemurafenib  
Dabrafenib**

- Keratosis pilaris (rash-like rough patches on skin)
- Eczema-like rash (usually very irritated, itchy patches on skin)
- Warts and wart-like growths
- Painful calluses, cracking of the skin
- More at risk of new melanomas and nonmelanoma skin cancers
- Sun sensitivity (burns can happen after just a few minutes of being in the sunlight without protection)

**Fluorouracil  
Capecitabine  
(Xeloda)**

- Sun sensitivity
- Rashes caused by being in the sunlight, even with minimal sunlight
- Parts of your skin that have prior sun damage, and/or pre-skin cancers can become red and painful
- Rash in areas that have been treated with radiation
- Hand rash and Hand Foot Syndrome (palms and soles become red, and there can be some peeling of the skin)

**Sorafenib  
Sunitinib  
Regorafenib  
Axitinib  
Pazopanib**

- Hand-foot skin reaction (painful calluses, can become infected)
- Loss of color in hair
- Yellowish discoloration of hair and nails
- Splinter hemorrhages in nails (splinter looking lines through nails)

**Ipilimumab  
Pembrolizumab  
Nivolumab**

- Itching of the skin without rash
- Eczema-like rash (usually very irritated, itchy patches on skin)
- Vitiligo-like hypopigmentation (white patches on the skin)

**Docetaxel  
Pertuzumab  
Trastuzumab**

- You are more at risk for skin and nail infections (watch for signs and let your doctor know right away)

For more information about taking care of your skin during treatment, visit the following websites:

1. CancerCare - Caring for Your Skin During Cancer Treatment

[www.cancercare.org/publications.76-caring\\_for\\_your\\_skin\\_during\\_cancer\\_treatment](http://www.cancercare.org/publications.76-caring_for_your_skin_during_cancer_treatment)

2. American Cancer Society -

Skin and Nail Changes Caused by Chemotherapy

[www.cancer.org/treatment/](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/understanding-chemotherapy-moreside-effects-skin-and-nail-changes)

[treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/understanding-chemotherapy-moreside-effects-skin-and-nail-changes)

[chemotherapy/understanding-chemotherapy-](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/understanding-chemotherapy-moreside-effects-skin-and-nail-changes)

[moreside-effects-skin-and-nail-changes](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/understanding-chemotherapy-moreside-effects-skin-and-nail-changes)

3. National Cancer Institute -

Chemo and You

[http://www.cancer.gov/publications/](http://www.cancer.gov/publications/patientseducation/chemotherapy-and-you.pdf)

[patientseducation/](http://www.cancer.gov/publications/patientseducation/chemotherapy-and-you.pdf)

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