

What to Do for Skin Changes

Cancer and cancer treatment can cause skin changes like rashes, dry skin, color changes, and itching.

Skin changes are part of your body's normal response to treatment. If skin changes happen very quickly while you are getting a drug used to treat cancer, they could be a sign that you are allergic to that drug.

It is very important to tell your cancer care team about any skin changes you have. If not treated, they can get worse and some might lead to infection.



What common skin changes should I watch for?

Rash is a common side effect of some cancer treatments. The risk of getting a rash and how bad it is depends on the type of cancer and the type of treatment you get. Rashes can show up on the scalp, face, neck, chest, upper back, and sometimes on other parts of the body. They can itch, burn, sting, or be painful.

Dry skin is another side effect of some treatments. The skin can become very dry, scaly, rough, red, and sometimes painful. It may even crack open. This can happen on its own or with a rash. Dry skin can cause itching.

Itching can be caused by some cancers, cancer treatments, medications used as part of cancer treatment, dry skin, rash, or infection. Scratching your skin a lot can cause the skin to bleed or get infected, especially if the skin is broken.

Hand-foot syndrome (HFS) can be caused by many cancer treatment drugs. Pain, sensitivity, tingling, and numbness are early symptoms of HFS. Then, redness and swelling start on the palms of the hands and the

soles of the feet. This redness looks a lot like sunburn and may blister. In bad cases, the blisters can open up and become sores. The skin also can become dry, peel, and crack.

Skin color changes can happen as a side effect of some cancer treatments, tumor growth, or being in the sun. Some color changes may get better with time. Other color changes may last longer.



What you can do to help prevent or control skin changes

Do:

- Drink at least 8 cups of liquids each day, if your cancer care team says it's OK.
- Use mild soaps, body washes, shampoos, lotions, and creams that do not contain alcohol, perfume, or dye. Ask what products or brands you should use.
- Wash with warm or cool water, not hot water. Keep baths short, and pat yourself dry with a towel rather than rubbing your skin.
- Moisturize your skin during the day. The best time to do this is right after you bathe, while your skin is still damp.
- Shave less often, or stop shaving if your skin is sore. An electric razor can help keep you from getting cut when shaving.
- Stay out of the sun as much as possible. If you will be outside, use lip balm and sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30. Wear clothes with long sleeves and a hat, too.



What you can do to make skin changes better

Do:

- Try gel shoe inserts if the soles of your feet are tender.
- Use makeup brands that can cover the rash without making it worse. Ask what products or brands you can use.
- Wear soft, loose-fitting clothing. It often feels better than tight-fitting clothes.
- Use medicine your cancer care team gives you and take it the way they tell you to take it.

Don't:

- Use laundry detergents with strong scents.
- Treat your skin with over-the-counter medicines before talking to your cancer care team.
- Spend time outside in very hot or very cold weather.



Talk to your cancer care team.

Many skin changes can be treated, and there are things you can do to try to prevent them. Tell your cancer care team about the skin changes you're having. Let them know when you notice the changes and what makes the changes worse or better. Skin changes can and should be treated as early as possible.

For cancer information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

