



Skin and Nail Changes – Side Effects of Treatment

Key Points

- Your skin and nails may go through changes during your cancer treatment.
- You may be able to lessen skin problems by changing your skin care routine and being careful about the types of products you use.
- Use clean instruments to keep your nails clean and trimmed. Always check with your doctor before getting a manicure or pedicure.

Cancer treatments may cause a variety of skin and nail changes like rashes, dry skin, itching (pruritus), peeling skin, redness, sensitivity to the sunlight (burns), blistering, and brittle or discolored nails. Treatments can lower your immune system and increase your risk of infection. Some of these conditions can be serious. Talk with your health care team about whether your treatment is likely to cause problems. If so, ask what symptoms you should watch for.

Prevention Tips – Keep Skin Healthy

Simple things you can do to help prevent or minimize skin problems.

- ✓ **Stay Hydrated.** Drink plenty of water (if you're not on fluid restriction).
- ✓ **Moisturize!** Shower in lukewarm, not hot, water. After showering, put moisturizing lotion on your skin while it's damp. Look for a moisturizer that won't clog your pores. Only shower/bathe once a day. Apply moisturizer at least twice a day. If your skin is very dry, try body butter, which is thicker and provides more of a barrier. An effective moisturizer should be absorbed quickly and not leave a greasy residue. If strong smells bother you, look for fragrance-free products. Look for a tester bottle to make sure the claims on the label are true. There are products for sensitive skin (Lubriderm® Daily Moisture Lotion for Sensitive Skin, Cetaphil® Moisturizing Cream) but you may be better with a single ingredient product such as shea or cocoa butter.
- ✓ **Adjust your skin care to the season.** Skin tends to be drier in the winter (bitter cold & dryness from some heat sources) and oilier in the summer (heat & humidity) – neither extreme is good for your skin. Winter: avoid alkaline deodorant soaps (Dial®, Camay®, Ivory®) and use super-fatted soaps (Dove® Cetaphil®, Oil of Olay®, Aveeno®) with lukewarm water.

- ✓ Stay out of the sun – or block it. Wear long sleeves and long pants. Protect face, ears, and neck with a wide-brimmed hat. Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher), especially on your hands, face, and neck. Ask your doctor if you should wear sun block every day.
- ✓ Treat your skin gently. Use products for sensitive skin (fragrance and alcohol free). Do not scratch, rub, or scrub your skin. Wear soft, non-irritating fabrics. Ask your doctor or nurse before you use hot or cold packs on your skin.
- ✓ Be as active as possible – short walks are good. If you cannot walk, move your arms and legs. This helps your circulation, which get nutrients to your skin and helps prevent skin problems such as sores.
- ✓ Make-up. Oil-free make-up tends to be well tolerated by all skin types. Look for make-up, lip balms, etc. that have sunscreen in them.
- ✓ Shaving. Women, if you get a rash after shaving your legs, do not shave again until your skin has healed completely. Men: If you get a rash on your face after shaving, skip shaving for a few days. Do not use perfumed products on your face such as after-shave.
- ✓ Tell your nurse right away if your skin starts to burn or hurt during your drug therapy.

Have a Rash?

- ✓ Ask your doctor or nurse how to clean the area. (In general, keep the area clean and dry.)
- ✓ If your doctor prescribes a cream for your rash, use it exactly as your doctor directs.
- ✓ Talk to your doctor before using any over-the-counter product on your rash or taking antihistamines.

Prevention Tips – Keep Nails Healthy

Problems with your nails can develop weeks or months into your treatment and may continue after you finish treatment. Your fingernails and toenails can become dry and develop lines and ridges. The nail beds can turn brown or black, and nails may even fall off. To care for your nails, we recommend:

- ✓ Do not bite your nails.
- ✓ Avoid fake nails or wraps.
- ✓ Check with doctor before getting a manicure or pedicure. If the risk of infection is too high and you want to paint your own nails, use a formaldehyde-free polish such as Pacifica 7 Free Nail Color or Bliss Genius Nail Polish) and non-acetone polish remover (check label), which are gentler.
- ✓ Trim nails often. Cut nails short and keep them clean, using clean nail instruments. Smooth any jagged edges and remove hangnails right away so you don't catch them on something and tear them off.
- ✓ Protect your hands. Wear gloves when you wash the dishes, work in the garden, or clean the house, especially when using harsh chemicals
- ✓ Tell your care team if one of your nails is loose or falls off.

