Dry Skin

Dry skin can be rough, flaky, red, and sometimes painful. It’s often caused by not having enough oil and water in the layers of the skin. Common causes of dry skin include dehydration⁴, heat, cold, or poor nutrition. In cancer patients, dry skin can be a side effect of cancer treatments like chemotherapy⁵, radiation therapy⁶, targeted therapy⁷, and stem cell transplant⁸.

What to look for

- Red, rough, flaky skin (although dry skin can look normal)
- Cracks in the skin
- Slight bleeding between the lines of skin covering joints, such as knuckles or elbows

What the patient can do

- Put on moisturizing, alcohol-free creams twice a day, especially after baths.
- Add mineral or baby oil to warm bath water, or put it on after showering while skin is still damp. (This can make you and the floor slippery, so hold onto something when you’re moving around barefoot.)
- Wash with cool or warm water, not hot water.
- Avoid scrubbing the skin during showers or baths. Gently pat skin dry after bathing.
- Avoid colognes, after-shaves, and after-bath splashes that contain alcohol.
- Use an electric razor.
- Drink 2 to 3 quarts of liquid a day, if you’ve been told it’s OK to do this. Ask your cancer care team how much is safe to drink.
- Protect your skin from cold and wind. Avoid hot water and heat, especially dry heat.
• Ask your cancer care team what you can do to help relieve dry skin.

What caregivers can do

• Help the patient put lotions or oils on hard-to-reach places.
• Offer extra fluids. Ask the cancer care team how much fluid is safe for the patient to drink.

Call the cancer care team if the patient

• Develops very rough, red, or painful skin
• Has signs of infection, such as pus or tenderness near broken skin

Hyperlinks

2. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html

References


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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

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