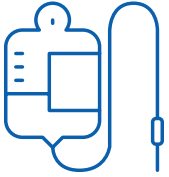


# What to Do for Skin Changes

Skin changes are part of your body's normal response to treatment. These changes can affect skin anywhere on your body, including your scalp. Most rashes and skin changes develop within a few weeks of treatment, but they can happen at any time.



## What causes skin changes in people with cancer?

Many things can cause skin changes in people with cancer. They include:

- Most types of cancer treatment, including chemotherapy, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, and radiation therapy
- Medicines like those for pain or nausea and vomiting
- Certain cancers, such as leukemia, lymphoma, and breast cancer
- Other health problems like psoriasis



## What are some common skin changes?

**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 its treatment. Rashes can show up on the scalp, face, neck, chest, upper back, and 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 treatment, medicines, 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 some medicines used for cancer treatment. 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 sun exposure. Some color changes may get better with time. Other color changes may last longer.



## How are skin changes treated?

Not all skin changes need to be treated. But if you have symptoms that are severe or don't go away, you might get:

- Therapies applied to the skin, such as moisturizers or steroid creams
- Oral steroids to help calm the immune reaction
- Immunotherapy for very severe rashes that don't respond to other treatments
- Antibiotics for very severe skin problems or an infection
- Other therapies, such as antihistamines, pain medicines, or cool cloths



## What can you do to help manage 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 is after you bathe, while your skin is still damp.
- Shave less often, or stop shaving if your skin is sore. Use an electric razor to help prevent cuts.

- Limit time in the sun. If you go outside, use lip balm and sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Wear clothes with long sleeves, and a hat, too.



## What can you do to help 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.



## When to talk with your cancer care team

Tell your cancer care team if you have:

- New or worsening rash, skin changes, or wounds
- Itching that doesn't go away or prevents you from being able to sleep for more than 2 days
- Rough, bright red, or painful skin areas
- Open, bleeding, or blistered skin
- Bruises that don't go away within a week
- Yellowish skin or whites of eyes

- Skin problems with drainage, pus, or other fluids that smell bad

Let your cancer care team know what makes the changes better or worse. Skin changes can and should be treated as early as possible. If not treated, they can get worse and some might lead to infection.



## When to call 911 or go to the ER

**Call 911 or go to the emergency room (ER) right away if you have signs or**

**symptoms of an allergic reaction, such as:**

- Swelling around your face, throat, or mouth
- Shortness of breath (may have pale skin or bluish lips or mouth)
- Coughing or wheezing
- Fast, short breaths
- Fast or irregular heart rate
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Sweating or cold, clammy skin
- Hives, welts, or itchy skin

**Or if you have skin changes along with any signs of infection, such as:**

- Fever or chills
- Shortness of breath
- Fast or irregular heart rate
- Low blood pressure
- New or worsening confusion
- Not having to pee or only peeing very little amounts that are dark orange or brown



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

