Skin Care during Radiation Therapy

The most common side effect to radiation therapy is skin changes or reactions in the area being treated. Skin changes in the treatment field can start anytime after treatment has started but, you may see the effects 1 – 2 weeks into your treatment. Skin reactions will gradually improve after you have completed your treatment.

*Please let you physician, nurse or therapist know if you develop a skin reaction.*

Skin reaction in the treatment area can look or feel like:
- Dry, itchy or start flaking
- May appear pink, tan or reddened
- May develop small blisters and peel in a more severe reaction
- Hair on the skin may disappear and perspiration may diminish

During your CT planning scan and/or your first week of treatment, multiple permanent reference points (tattoos) will be applied. These reference points are about the size of a small freckle and are very important in setting up your daily treatment. These reference points are also important if you ever require future treatment as your radiation team will know where your previous radiation field was. Within the first 2-3 treatments, your treatment field will be drawn in with an FDA approved marking pen on your skin. The therapists will try to remove the markings as much as possible. Please wear a dark colored shirt on this day.

The following hints will help minimize any skin problems involving ONLY the skin exposed to radiation:

Continue to take a daily shower or bath using lukewarm water and a gentle soap. We recommend Dove fragrance free for sensitive skin, Basis, or Neutrogena. Please use only your hands (no washcloths) soaped to gently wash skin in the treatment area and rinse gently with lukewarm water. Gently pat your skin dry. Try to keep radiated skin dry. Air exposure is enhanced by wearing loose fitting clothing. Light weight cottons/undergarments can also increase ventilation to the skin surface.

Skin surfaces that rub on each other such as the groin, buttocks, breasts, belly folds, and armpits are areas where chafing and skin reactions can easily develop. These are also areas that are likely to stay moist and may need an additional bath each day. A light dusting of corn starch can also keep these areas dry and help reduce friction of skin rubbing on skin.

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Avoid using any powders, lotions, deodorants, ointments, or cosmetics in the treatment area unless approved by your physician or nurse. Most lotions, powders, and deodorants contain perfume, fragrance or metal and will increase the skin reaction to radiation.

**Protect your skin from injury due to friction, irritation, pressure, heat, cold, sun, and/or wind.**

**Avoid:**

- Rubbing or scratching treated skin.

- Tight fitting clothing over your treatment area such as a girdle, bras belt or jeans; turning clothes inside out (like pajamas) keep seams from rubbing and irritating skin in the treatment field.

- Nylon, spandex and polyesters as they hold and trap heat.

- Wool and corduroy which are rough fabrics on the treated skin.

- Do not use heating pads, hot water bottles, hot baths, showers or Jacuzzis as these can intensify skin reaction and can cause burns in the treatment area.

- Do not use ice packs, ice bags on radiated skin as it will cause blistering of the skin.

- Avoid the use of tape or band aids in the treatment area as it will take radiated skin off when removed.

- Avoid direct sun, even when riding in a car as the sun shines through the window and it will affect your radiated skin. Wear a wide brimmed hat and protective clothing when in the sun.

**After completion of Radiation Treatments:**

- The skin in the treatment area may always be a little more sensitive than the rest of the body. The skin may be drier; the skin may fade back to normal or have a darker appearance.

- Continue to protect your radiated skin after treatment finishes and your skin reaction clears/heals. Once your skin is back to normal you may resume normal bathing and body care with products of your choice. Please always protect your skin from the sun by wearing UV protective clothing, a broad brimmed hat, and broad spectrum sun block of SPF 15 or higher.

**Always ask or inform your physician, nurse, or therapist about products you are using on your skin before treatments.** Also ask and notify your physician, nurse or therapist of any questions or concerns you may have about your skin.