

Nail and Skin Care

During cancer therapy, you may notice changes in your skin and/or nails. These changes vary based on the type and dose of therapy you are receiving. Some common changes with radiation therapy include redness, peeling, thin or fragile skin and/or increased sensitivity to sunlight. If you are receiving chemotherapy, you may notice changes in skin tone or pigmentation, very dry skin, rashes, redness, peeling, and/or increased sensitivity to sunlight. If you develop any of these problems, be sure to show them to your oncology healthcare team, as they can be signs of reactions to some medications or can require adjustments to the doses of chemotherapy or radiation. Your fingernails, and possibly toenails, may become discolored, weak, break or lift off, or develop ridges (which will grow out over time). For most people, the nail changes are temporary and will grow back to normal after some time. It may take about 6 months after treatment is stopped for nails to return to prior condition.

General tips for caring for your skin:

- Wash with warm water and a mild, unscented soap.
- You can use your normal deodorant. If a product appears to cause irritation, stop using it and try another brand. You may benefit from a "non-allergenic" product.
- Use an electric razor for shaving to avoid cuts.
- Avoid tight clothing or irritating fabrics, such as wool, that may rub your skin.
- Protect your skin from sunlight. Use SPF 30 or higher, even on overcast days. Wear a hat and long sleeved clothing to cover exposed skin and/or carry an umbrella when out during peak sun hours.
- Protect your skin from extreme cold or heat.

Dry skin is a common side effect. Tips for dealing with dry skin include:

- Use an emollient, which are creams that soften skin and moisturize. Creams tend to be more effective than lotions. Some examples are Eucerin®, Aquaphor®, Nivea®, and Cetaphil®.
- Avoid perfumed or scented lotions, as these can be irritating.
- Apply your moisturizer or cream after your shower or bath when skin is still damp.
- Don't forget to moisturize your lips! Try an eye or face cream to moisten the sensitive skin on your face.
- Drink 8-10 glasses of non-alcoholic fluid a day.

Nails can be affected by cancer therapy too. Here are some tips for dealing with nail changes:

- Avoid cutting cuticles; this can be a source of infection. Use a cuticle cream instead. If you need to cut your cuticle, be sure to clean the clipper before using it.
- Artificial fingernails can harbor bacteria and lead to infections, so you should not use them.
- Nails absorb water and expand, then contract as they dry out. The more they expand and contract, the weaker they become, so wear gloves to protect your nails when doing housework or gardening.
- Keep your hands moisturized and your nails cut short.
- You may want to use nail polish to give your nails extra strength and cover imperfections.
- Soaking your nails in or massaging the nail with oil, such as vegetable or olive, helps replace moisture lost from water exposure. These natural oils lack the alcohol containing fragrance often found in commercial nail products.
- If your nails break or lift off, try to keep them clean and protected. Covering the nail with a band-aid can protect it from trauma. Clean with soap and warm water and apply an antibiotic ointment twice a day.
- If the nail or nail bed appears infected (redness, swelling, warm to the touch), inform your healthcare team.