

Dry, sore and itchy skin

Cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, targeted therapies and radiotherapy may affect how your skin looks and feels. Depending on the treatment you have and how you react to it, your skin may become, dry, sore and itchy. Other treatments, such as the painkillers morphine and diamorphine, can also cause itching. Some treatments can make your skin more sensitive to the sun. Some treatments can cause a rash.

Itching can also be caused by chemicals released by the cancer (especially some cancers of the blood) or by kidney and liver problems, or jaundice. Dry skin and itching can also be a symptom of some types of cancer.

Dry skin can also be caused by a condition called lymphoedema. Lymphoedema is a build-up of fluid in the tissues that can happen if the lymph glands (nodes) have been removed or damaged. Swelling can develop in the arms, legs and sometimes other parts of the body. The skin can feel tight, which can make it dry and crack easily.

Tell your doctor or specialist nurse if you have problems with your skin. There may be treatments to help. If you are having radiotherapy or targeted therapies, the staff at the hospital will advise you on how to care for your skin. Check with them before using any skin products.

Tips for managing dry, sore and itchy skin

- Hot water dries out the skin and makes the itching worse. Have cool or lukewarm baths or showers. Avoid soaking too long in the bath.
- Use non-perfumed bath and shower oils. Avoid using soap, as this will dry your skin out even more.
- Pat your skin dry with a clean, soft towel, instead of rubbing it.
- If you have bath, try tying a muslin bag filled with oatmeal over your bath tap and letting the water run through. Or try adding an emollient (moisturising solution) such as Oilatum® to bath water and use aqueous cream instead of soap. A little baking soda added to plain bath water can also help.
- Look for rich and creamy moisturisers. Choose one which made from moisturising ingredients such as petroleum jelly (Vaseline®), shea butter or glycerine. Do not use products containing sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS).
- Itchy skin may be relieved by using an emollient cream that contains oatmeal, menthol or 10% urea. Ask your cancer nurse specialist or oncology team for advice. They may prescribe you something to reduce itching.
- When cleansing your face use a gentle cleanser with a creamy formulation. Remove the cleanser with a damp cotton wool pad or a clean, damp flannel. If you are using a toner, do not use products that contain alcohol, as these can dry out your skin.
- Protect yourself in the sun with minimum factor SPF30 sun cream with at least four or five UVA stars.
- If you have had radiotherapy to an area where you would normally shave, use an electric shaver instead of wet-shaving to minimise the risk of cuts.
- After bathing, apply emollients or aqueous cream while your skin is still damp.
- Keep cool by wearing light, natural fibres, such as cotton.
- Avoid using perfumed or coloured skin products.
- Use a moisturiser at least once a day on your face and body.

Local resources:

Resource	Contact details

National resources:

Resource	Contact details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look Good Feel Better • Skin support • Skinship (UK) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk Tel 0137 274 7500 • www.skincare.org.uk • www.skinshipuk.org

Further information

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/changes-to-appearance-and-body-image/changes-during-treatment/caring-for-skin-and-nails

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on be.macmillan.org.uk

- **Side effects of cancer treatment**
- **Managing the symptoms and cancer**
- **Body image and cancer**
- **Understanding lymphoedema**

More information and support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit macmillan.org.uk

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you would like to use.

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call our support line.