

Dry, itchy or sore skin

This information is about dry, itchy or sore skin. Different treatments can [affect your skin](#) in different ways. Your healthcare team will tell you about any changes that might happen due to cancer treatment.

Rashes, redness, dry skin or acne can be side effects of different cancer drugs, such as [chemotherapy](#), [targeted therapy](#), [immunotherapy](#), [hormonal therapy](#) or [steroids](#). Some cancer drugs also make your skin more sensitive to sunlight. Certain drugs can cause a side effect called palmar-plantar or hand-foot syndrome, which affects the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. [Radiotherapy](#) can affect the skin colour in the treated area, or cause broken veins to appear later.

Always tell your cancer doctor, nurse or pharmacist about any skin changes. Your cancer team may give you advice about looking after your skin. It is very important to follow their advice. There may be some products you need to use or need to avoid.

Itching can be a symptom of some cancers. Itching can be caused by:

- dry skin
- chemicals released by the cancer – this can happen with some cancers of the blood
- medication – for example, the painkillers morphine and diamorphine
- jaundice
- kidney and liver problems.

Tips for managing dry, sore or itchy skin

- If your skin is dry, use a moisturiser or emollient cream at least 2 times a day. An emollient cream containing menthol can be soothing. Keeping the cream in the fridge means it will feel cool and soothing when you are putting it on.
- Try to have a cool or lukewarm bath or shower. Keep your bath or shower to under 20 minutes to prevent drying your skin. You can wash with an emollient cream instead of soap. After a bath or shower, apply moisturiser while your skin is still damp.
- If your skin is itchy, keep your nails clean and short. This will stop them damaging the skin.
- Rub or pat the itchy area instead of scratching it. Avoid things that may irritate your skin such as biological washing powders, scented soaps and bubble baths.
- If you have dry or sore lips, use a lip balm. Choose one made from moisturising ingredients such as shea butter, glycerine or coconut oil. Use a lip balm with a sun protection factor (SPF).
- If you are having radiotherapy, wear loose-fitting clothes around the area that is being treated. Only use skin products as advised by the radiotherapy staff. Use an electric razor instead of wet-shaving.
- If you are out in the sun, use suncream with a high sun protection factor on exposed areas (at least SPF 30). Protect your skin by staying out of the sun at the hottest time of the day.
- If your hands and feet are sore, keep them cool and gently moisturise them regularly. Protect your hands by wearing gloves when working in the house or garden. Avoid tight-fitting socks, shoes and gloves.
- If you develop a rash, always get it checked by your cancer doctor or specialist nurse straight away. They will know the cause and be able to give you advice.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including [audiobooks](#). Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on orders.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- MAC12921 [Side effects of cancer treatment](#)
- MAC11671 [Managing the symptoms of cancer](#)
- MAC14192 [Body image and cancer](#)
- MAC16330_ER [Side effects from chemotherapy](#) – Easy read

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

Further Macmillan 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 to [chat online](#) to one of our team.

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

If you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- Look good feel better – visit www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk or call **0137 274 7500**
- Look good feel better for men – visit www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk/support/men
- Skinship – visit www.skinshipuk.org or call **0155 742 8504**

Notes and questions
