Skin care during your radiotherapy

Information for patients, carers and healthcare professionals
This leaflet explains how to care for your skin during radiotherapy treatment and reduce the risk of further problems.

The start, severity and length of your skin reaction will depend on many different things

**Factors beyond your control:**

- your age - older skin may repair more slowly;
- other illnesses you may have for example diabetes;
- skin folds within the treatment area - the staff will check these areas of your skin regularly;
- previous and continued exposure to the sun.

**Other factors that you can control:**

- **Your diet** - a well balanced diet may help your skin recover.
- **Smoking** - smoking during your treatment will make your skin reaction worse, please cut down/stop where possible and avoid passive smoking.
- **Skin irritants** - perfumed skin products; talcum powder, extremes of heat or cold for example hot water bottles or cold packs; Sudacrem cream.
- **Friction** - anything that will cause friction on your skin in your treatment area,
  - for example tight clothing, underwired bras, collars or tights on your treatment area;
  - wear loose comfortable clothing. Cotton clothing next to your skin is better than nylon or polyester.
• **Washing** - keeping your skin clean with a daily wash, using your usual products.

• **Avoid** swimming as chlorine in the water can irritate your skin.

• **Keep** the treated area covered when out in the sun and cold winds.

If you are using any prescribed creams or ointments in the treatment area you **must** tell your radiographers when you first start your treatment. They will check to make sure you can continue to use these.

**Changes to your skin**

Around the second week after you start treatment you may notice changes to the skin in the area being treated.

**During and after radiotherapy your skin may:**

• Feel warm and more sensitive.

• Be pinker than usual, if you have dark skin you may notice it becomes deeper in colour.

• Flake or sometimes peel and weep towards the end of treatment or a few weeks after your treatment has finished, the radiotherapy nursing team will advise you on the best dressing to use.

• Sweat less.

• Hair in the treated area may fall out but will usually regrow later.

• Your skin may become itchy.

Skin changes may continue for a few weeks after your treatment has finished and then gradually settle down.
If you are only having one to two treatments these changes may happen sooner or not at all.

If you have any worries during your treatment, please talk to your radiographer, nurse or doctor.

How you can help

The skin in the treated area should be gently washed using warm water with your usual products. Do not soak in a hot bath. Gently pat the skin dry using a soft towel. If you already use a moisturiser you may continue.

If your scalp is in the treated area wash your hair using a mild shampoo. Be gentle, do not scrub the scalp, rinse and pat dry with a soft towel. Only use a hair dryer on a cool air setting.

Your skin will be checked by your radiographers each day of treatment, please tell them if it becomes irritated or itchy. If needed additional creams or dressings will be given to soothe your skin.

If we give you cream for your skin only use this cream and do not use other types of creams or lotions in the treatment area as these will make the reaction worse.

When you first use any new lotion or cream if your skin becomes irritated, stop using them and seek advice.
**Cosmetics and deodorants**

Aerosol deodorants can cause more irritation but you may use a roll-on deodorant during treatment. Stop using deodorants if your skin becomes irritated or broken and seek advice from your radiotherapy team.

Do not apply perfumes or cosmetics to the treated area. Do not use wax, creams or wet razor for hair removal. These may cause irritation during treatment and while the skin is settling down afterwards. Wait until your skin has recovered before using these products again.

**After your treatment**

The radiographers will give you a further leaflet.

**Your skin and the sun**

Skin that has received radiotherapy treatment can be very sensitive to sunlight. If you are going to be out in the sun keep your skin covered with clothes or a hat as appropriate. Some clothing does not offer enough protection against the sun. If the material has an open weave it will not protect your skin.

A high factor sun cream (Factor 50 with a minimum 4☆) can be used after your treatment course is finished and your skin has healed. It is advisable to use high factor sun cream on all your skin (treated and untreated) if exposed to the sun.
Contacts

If you have any concerns about your skin in the treatment area please tell your radiographers when you come for your treatment.

If your skin starts to peel or weep then please ring:

The Princess Royal Suite  Tel: 0113 206 7587