NHS
The Leeds Teaching Hospitals
NHS Trust

Skin Care During and After your Radiotherapy Treatment

Information for patients

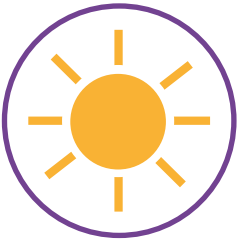
Leeds Cancer Centre

This leaflet has been provided to make you aware of the possible side effects radiotherapy may cause to your skin. It also informs you how to care for your skin during and after your treatment.

What changes can I expect to my skin during and after my radiotherapy treatment?

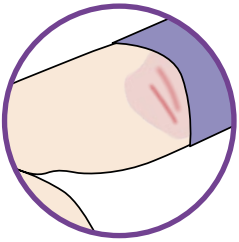
- You may notice your skin becomes pinker or darker in colour.
- Itching and soreness of the skin is possible.
- Your skin may feel warm to touch.
- Dryness, flaking, and a possibility of your skin breaking down causing your skin to weep.
- Blistering and peeling of the skin.
- Skin can feel tight.

What can cause my skin to worsen during radiotherapy?



Your skin may always be a lot more sensitive to the sun than the rest of your body

Using harsh chemicals such as makeup and fake tan on the treated area



Friction underneath folds of the skin such as the breast, buttocks and armpits

Wearing tight fitted clothing that may rub against the skin

Scratching at your skin to relieve the itching

Smoking can reduce the supply of oxygen to the skin, increasing skin reactions

DO's and Don'ts to looking after your skin during radiotherapy

Do's:

- ☑ Keep your skin covered and protected from the sun. Wear loose fitted clothing and a high factor 50 sunscreen.
- ☑ If using a moisturiser, place it in the fridge before using it on your skin. This can help cool the area down, relieve itching and keep your skin hydrated.
- ☑ Take antihistamines to relieve itching. These can be bought over the counter from your local pharmacy. Please check with your GP before taking.
- ☑ Moisturise your skin daily. If introducing new products, make sure to patch test before using it on the treated area.
- ☑ Use mild temperature water when washing.
- ☑ Be gentle with your skin. Always pat dry instead of rubbing.
- ☑ Apply dressings to broken areas of the skin. These can be provided by your radiotherapy nurses.
- ☑ Drink plenty of water.
- ☑ Eat a nutritional well-balanced diet.
- ☑ Continue to use aerosol or roll-on deodorant if you would like to do so.
- ☑ Showering is recommended over soaking in the bath.
- ☑ Let your radiographers know of any skin changes.

Don’ts:

- ☒ Avoid using a hot water bottle on your skin. This can cause further irritation.
- ☒ Smoking can cause more severe skin reactions. Please speak to a radiographer if you need help quitting smoking or cutting down.
- ☒ Don’t wear a tight or underwired bra, collared clothing or tights. This depends on the area of your body you are having treatment to. You can always ask a radiographer or nurse if you are unsure.
- ☒ Don’t apply moisturiser/lotions within the hour before your treatment to avoid leaving a thick layer of this on your skin. These may be still applied at any other time of the day.
- ☒ Don’t use any skin care products on your skin if you notice your skin has broken down.
- ☒ Avoid hair removal where possible, including shaving, waxing, cream and lasers unless advised otherwise by your consultant, nurse or radiographer.
- ☒ Don’t use makeup or other cosmetics in the treatment area.

Good to know

1. We do not recommend a certain brand of moisturiser/ lotion, shampoo and other skin products. Everyone is different and can react differently to each product.
2. If you would like to start using a new skin care product during treatment: it is better to do this at the start of treatment, rather than the end. Please try out any new products on a different part of your body, before applying to the treatment area.
3. If you are not sure about using a certain skin care product, bring it in when you come for treatment. The ingredients can be checked by the healthcare team.
4. Radiotherapy treatment rarely causes side effects straight away. However, you may notice skin changes (redness, dry/ flaky skin, discolouration and breaks on your skin in the treatment area) as your treatment progresses. This is all perfectly normal.
5. The radiotherapy treatment affects everybody's skin differently. Some people may notice more severe side effects than others, even after following the same advice. You may not notice any changes to the skin at all. This does not mean the treatment is not working.
6. The information in this leaflet is to be used as a guide. If you have any questions or need further advice, please speak to a radiographer or nurse.

What can I do and expect after finishing my radiotherapy treatment?

- Keep an eye on your skin, as the radiotherapy treatment continues to work inside your body over the next two weeks.
- Please continue with the same skin care routine for at least two weeks after finishing radiotherapy treatment. This is because side effects can still develop after treatment.
- If you are worried about your skin or need further advice after finishing radiotherapy treatment, please contact the radiotherapy nurses. The telephone contact number is available in this leaflet.
- You should keep the treated area out of the sun for 12 months after finishing treatment. After this, you will always need to use a high factor sun cream on the treated area.

Suitable dressings following treatment

Your GP should be able to provide you with dressings after treatment. Dressings must be either non-adhesive or silicone based.

We would recommend:

- Mepilex lite.
- Mepilex border.
- Polymem.
- Mepilex.
- Actiform Cool (can be used for hot or itchy skin in the treatment area).

If tape is needed to secure dressings, Mepitac should be used.

A yellow/green coloured exudate (discharge) may develop over broken skin.

This is a part of the healing process and contains enzymes which help the skin to heal. Dressings applied will absorb this exudate and should be kept in place until the outer layer appears stained.

If you have any queries, you can contact:

The Princess Royal Suite Nurses. Telephone: 0113 206 7587

Order numbers for any of the products listed can be supplied to healthcare professionals by calling the number above.

If your GP requires any further information on skin care after Radiotherapy please phone the above number.

Alternatively they can email:

leedsth-tr.RTReviewClinic@nhs.net for an electronic copy

What did you think of your care?

Visit: www.leedsth.nhs.uk/patients/support/feedback-complaints/friends-family-test/

Scan or click the QR code - Your views matter

© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 3rd Edition Version 1

Developed by: Ulfatt Bibi - Radiotherapy Practitioner, Hannah Barron - Radiotherapy Advanced Practitioner and Rosie Clark - Radiotherapy Review Clinic Sister.

Produced by: Medical Illustration Services • MID code: 20260709_001/BW

LN005131
Publication date 08/2026
Review date 08/2029