

What are skin wounds?

Patients with cancer may have wounds on different parts of their body. Wounds may be:

- Flat or raised
- A different colour from other skin
- Filled with fluid or pus,
- Be open with active oozing
- Closed and dry.

Malignant wounds are sores that happen when cancer cells invade the skin. They may smell bad, have oozing and/or bleeding and may be painful.

Many skin symptoms come with cancer and cancer treatments. You may have:

- Dryness
- Rash
- Itching
- Peeling
- Sores
- Pain
- Swelling

A chronic wound that does not heal can be a serious burden.

It is important for you to know about skin problems so you can tell your health care team about them right way. This way, they can treat them quickly to lower discomfort and the risk of infection.



What causes skin wounds?

Skin wounds are most common for people who have cancer of the breast, head and neck, skin, soft tissue, and some cancers of the genitourinary (genital and urinary) system.

Wounds may be from the primary cancer or a metastasis (spread from original spot in the body) to the skin from a tumour.

As a tumour breaks through the skin, it can stay open and the skin can start to die and smell bad.

When should I talk to my health care team?

- If you are having skin problems
- If you notice any skin changes
- If your skin problems get worse
- If you have a wound that is not healing.

Every malignant wound is unique. Each person responds differently. Painful wounds can affect your physical, psychological, social, sexual and spiritual well-being.

What are the treatments for skin wounds?

Your health care team may use charcoal bandages and topical (on the skin) antibiotics.

Skin Care during Radiation Therapy

If you are having skin problems from radiation therapy, please review the Skin Care handout we gave you. You can find the handout on our website: http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/patient-and-public-info-site/Documents/BCCancer_CareOfRadiationTherapySideEffectsSkinCare_FactSheet.pdf

If you do not have a copy of this handout, please ask your health care team for one.

Talk to your health care team if you are having skin problems from radiation therapy.

Skin Care during Systemic Therapy

Chemotherapy

Some chemotherapy drugs cause skin changes to your hands and feet. This is called Palmar-Plantar Erythrodyesthesia (eh-rith-roh-dis-es-thee-zhuh). This is also called PPE.

- Skin on your palms and soles of your feet can become painful, red, dry, swollen and may blister and peel.
- You may feel numbness, tingling, burning and pain.

Immunotherapy

Some immunotherapy drugs cause skin rashes. These may vary from a mild rash to a more severe acne-like rash.

You may get:

- Redness or a warm sensation, like a sun burn.
- Tender pimples and pus.
- Dryness.
- Itchiness.
- Sensitivity to sunlight.

What can I do for myself?

- Look at your skin daily.
- Wash sweat off your skin.
- Wear gloves if doing manual labor, like gardening or woodworking.
- Wear loose fitting clothes and shoes.
- Protect your skin from sunlight.
- Use warm water, not hot water, on your skin.
- Get gel shoe inserts to cushion your feet.
- Use creams, lotions and ointments that your health care team has told you to use.
- Change your bandages as your health care team has told you to.

Where can I learn more?

- BC Cancer Library Recommended Skin and Wound Websites: www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library/recommended-websites/managing-symptoms-and-side-effects-websites/skin-wound-care-websites
- BC Cancer Supportive Care Services: www.bccancer.bc.ca/supportivecare

