

Managing Chemotherapy Side Effects

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Skin and Nail Changes

To order free copies of this fact sheet, please call 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER).

Let your doctor or nurse know if:

- Your skin is itchy, dry, red, or hurts
- Your nails are dark, yellow, or cracked

Call your doctor or nurse if:

- You develop sudden or severe itching
- Your skin has a rash or hives



"I was glad to learn that most skin and nail problems go away after treatment. For now, my nurse told me about a lotion to help my skin feel better."

For minor *skin* problems:

Be careful what you put on your skin.

- Use only mild soaps that are gentle on your skin.
- Use lotions and creams. Ask your nurse when to use them.
- Don't use products on your skin that have alcohol or perfume in them.

Ask what products or brands you should use on your skin.

Protect your skin from the sun.

- Try to stay out of the sun.
- When you are outside, always wear sunscreen and lip balm. Or wear a long-sleeved shirt, pants, and a hat with a wide brim outdoors.
- Don't use tanning beds.



Treat your skin gently.

- It may help to take short showers or baths in warm water. Don't take long baths in hot water. Pat your skin dry instead of rubbing it.
- Dusting your skin with cornstarch may help. Put it in the folds of your skin such as under your arms, behind your knees, and under your breasts.
- Shave less often, or stop shaving if your skin is sore.



For minor *nail* problems:

- Keep your nails clean and cut short. Check with your nurse before you get a manicure.
- Wear gloves when you wash the dishes, work in the garden, or clean the house.
- Check with your nurse for products that can help your nails.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. What brands of soap and lotion are best for me to use?
3. What should the SPF (sun protection factor) be in the sunscreen and lip balm that I use?
4. Would a special oatmeal bath help my skin to itch less?
5. What products can help my nails?
6. When will these problems go away?
7. After treatment, how much longer will I need to use sunscreen?

Free Services to Learn More

**National Cancer Institute
Cancer Information Service**

Phone: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

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