

## 16. Dry, Itchy or Sore Skin

Dry, itchy or sore skin is a common symptom of cancer and may affect any area of the body. It could be a symptom of lymphoedema (see 'Swollen Limb' section for further advice). Other causes include chemicals released by the cancer, medication, jaundice or kidney problems. Minor skin problems are extremely common when a patient is having chemotherapy.

### How can I manage my skin problem?

**It's important NOT to use any creams or dressings unless they have been prescribed or recommended by a doctor, specialist nurse or radiographer. If you are having radiotherapy you should follow the skin care advice given by your radiographer.**

- Using a moisturiser, such as aqueous cream, twice a day can help with dry skin. Other suitable skin creams can be prescribed by a doctor. Store any creams in the fridge so that it will feel soothing on application.
- If the skin is broken and there is the possibility of infection (e.g. high temperature, redness of the skin, feeling unwell or loss of appetite) antibiotics might be needed so please contact your Oncology Doctor.
- Avoid sunburn to the areas of skin most affected. If you are in the sun use a very high factor sun cream.
- Use anti-fungal powder to prevent athlete's foot if the feet are affected.
- For acne, keep face clean and use over-the-counter face soaps and creams.
- Itchiness and dryness of the skin can be soothed with corn starch, and by avoiding long, hot baths. Moisturise immediately after washing whilst skin is still moist. Avoid any products that contain alcohol in them. A colloidal oatmeal bath helps soothe skin complaints (recipes can be found online for a homemade version). Diphenhydramine hydrochloride (trade name Benadryl) is also extremely beneficial for pruritis (an itch or a sensation that makes a person want to scratch).
- Keeping as cool as possible will reduce itchiness, so wear loose cotton clothes to allow air to circulate over the skin. At night choose light cotton bedcovers and keep the bedroom as cool as possible.
- Keep nails short and clean to avoid causing any skin damage when scratching.
- Darkening of the skin all along the vein can occur when certain anticancer drugs are given intravenously. This is more common with individuals who have very dark skin. Makeup to cover the darkening can be used but can be time consuming. Changes in darkened skin will fade usually within a few months after treatment ends.
- After radiotherapy some patients can experience 'radiation recall' whereby skin that has been exposed to radiation treatment turns red (this can range from light to very bright red). This 'radiation recall' can resemble that of a burn and can blister and peel. It can last from a few hours to days and can be soothed by placing a cool wet compress over the affected area and wearing soft, non-irritating fabrics to avoid aggravation. To prevent this you should use a high factor sun block it out in the sun. Women who have received radiation therapy for breast cancer following lumpectomy have suggested that cotton bras are the most comfortable to wear.
- Some relaxation techniques can be helpful in reducing itchiness.

## Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<b>Lymphoedema Service</b> This is a nurse led service providing individualised care and encouraging self-management through specialised treatment and education with the aim to allow the individual to lead as independent a life as possible.	Located at <b>St Lukes' Turnchapel</b> site and requires a referral from a consultant, GP or CNS.
<b>Mustard Tree Cancer Support &amp; Triangle Drop In Centres</b> Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers	<b>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital:</b> Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 <b>Kingsbridge:</b> Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 <b>Liskeard:</b> Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 <b>Tavistock:</b> Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
<b>Other Resources</b>	Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse or District Nurse.

## National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<b>The Lymphoedema Support Network</b>	<a href="http://www.lymphoedema.org/lsn/index.html">www.lymphoedema.org/lsn/index.html</a>
<b>Macmillan Cancer Support</b> Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.	www.macmillan.org.uk <b>0808 808 0000</b> (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)

## Further Information:

<b>Macmillan booklets:</b> – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre
Cancer and complementary therapies
Controlling cancer pain
Controlling the symptoms of cancer
Understanding chemotherapy
Understanding radiotherapy
Understanding lymphoedema