

Cancer treatments that destroy cancer cells can also damage healthy cells. This may cause side effects that can affect the skin, nails, hair and mouth. Good hygiene and personal care may help manage these side effects and improve quality of life.

SKIN

Cancer treatments may cause side effects such as dry/peeling skin, rashes, itching (pruritus) and increased risk of sunburn.

Your doctor can advise you how to protect your skin, prevent infections and reduce itching. Tell your doctor about any changes to your skin.

Nine Ways to Take Care of Your Skin

1. Take a warm (not hot) bath or shower every day with mild, unscented soap or body wash.
2. Pat skin dry (instead of rubbing) with a towel.
3. Use unscented lotion or moisturizing cream immediately after shower to prevent cracking.
4. Use lip balm for dry or chapped lips.
5. Avoid activities that put you at risk for cuts, injuries or burns.
6. Use an electric shaver, not a razor, to prevent cuts.
7. Rinse cuts and scrapes immediately under running water and remove any debris from the wound. Wash the skin around the wound with soap. To avoid irritation, do not use soap on the wound. If you have a low platelet count and are at risk for bleeding issues, ask your doctor how to care for cuts.
8. Avoid direct sun when possible. Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher and reapply every 2 hours.
9. Use unscented, gentle laundry detergent. Some laundry detergents can irritate sensitive skin.

Tell your doctor immediately if you notice:

- Sudden or severe itching, rash and/or hives. These may be signs of an allergic reaction.
- Red, swollen or tender skin and/or discharge from skin, especially around a wound, sore, rash or IV catheter site. These may be signs of an infection.

FINGERNAILS AND TOENAILS

Chemotherapy may darken, crack or make fingernails and toenails brittle. Some patients develop white ridges or bands of discoloration along the nails, or a darkening of the nail bed. A few chemotherapy patients may lose all or part of their fingernails/toenails. Nails usually grow back or return to normal after treatment ends.

Tell your doctor about any changes to your nails, especially pain, redness, discoloration, odor or discharge from under the nail. These could be signs of infection.

Seven Ways to Take Care of Your Nails and Hands

1. Keep your fingernails and toenails trimmed short.
2. Wear cotton gloves when working. When cleaning or washing dishes, use cotton-lined rubber gloves to keep your hands from becoming dry and irritated. Do not use unlined rubber gloves because they seal in sweat and irritate the skin.
3. Avoid manicures, pedicures and artificial nails, which may increase the risk of infection.
4. Do not bite your nails or pick at your cuticles.
5. Nail polish can help strengthen and may protect nails. To take off polish, use "oily" remover to prevent drying.
6. Soak your hands in natural oils (such as olive oil), to relieve dryness.
7. Wear loose-fitting shoes with cushioned cotton socks.

HAIR

Some types of cancer treatments can cause hair loss (called "alopecia"). Talk to your doctor about whether your treatment may result in hair loss so you will know what to expect.

With chemotherapy, hair loss can range from hair thinning to baldness and may be sudden or slow. You may also lose hair from other areas of your body including your eyelashes, eyebrows and pubic hair. Hair growth typically resumes after treatment ends. After treatment, your hair's thickness, texture, and color may be different from before treatment.

Radiation therapy can also cause hair loss, but unlike chemotherapy, it only affects the specific area that is being treated. Hair loss may be temporary or permanent. Often, with lower doses of radiation, hair loss is temporary, and hair grows back. Treatment with very high doses of radiation may cause hair to grow back thinner or not at all in that spot.

Nine Ways to Cope With Hair Loss

1. Wash your hair and scalp every 2 to 4 days with a fragrance-free shampoo and conditioner. Rinse your hair well, and pat it dry with a soft towel.

2. Continue to comb or brush your hair, even if hair loss begins. To remove tangles, use a soft-bristle brush, comb or wet fingers. Gently comb hair at the ends and work your way up. Not combing or washing your hair will not prevent hair loss.
 3. Use hats, scarves, caps or bandanas to keep your head warm and to protect the delicate scalp from sunburn.
 4. If your scalp is dry, use mineral oil or coconut oil.
 5. Avoid perms, chemical relaxers, permanent hair dyes, bleach and hairspray, which may damage hair and irritate the scalp. Do not use curlers, hair straighteners or curling irons because the heat can damage your hair.
 6. Do not put your hair in braids, corn rows or tight ponytails; all of these can cause breakage. Likewise, do not use clips or ties that hold the hair tightly.
 7. If you plan to wear a wig, see a wig stylist before hair loss is expected so the color, style and texture of your hair can be matched. Or save some pieces of your own hair and take them with you to the stylist. Ask your doctor to write a prescription for a wig (insurance may help with the cost).
 8. You may want to get a short haircut or shave your head before hair loss begins; some patients do this.
 9. If you lose your eyebrows, you can draw them in with a makeup pencil.
4. Do not use a mouthwash that contains alcohol. Alcohol can make a sore mouth worse.
 5. Keep your mouth moist by drinking water, sucking on ice chips or sugar-free hard candy, chewing sugarless gum or using a saliva substitute.
 6. Wear dentures only for meals. Clean dentures well. Remove them when you are not eating to ease a sore mouth.
 7. Avoid tobacco use, which irritates the mouth. Visit www.smokefree.gov to get help to quit.

To learn more, visit www.LLS.org/booklets to view *Dental and Oral Complications of Cancer Treatment Facts*.

GRAFT-VERSUS-HOST DISEASE

Changes to the skin, nails, hair and mouth can also be symptoms of graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), a potentially serious complication of allogeneic stem cell transplantation.

To learn more, visit www.LLS.org/booklets to view *Graft-Versus-Host Disease*.

TEETH AND MOUTH

Oral side effects may include mouth sores, dry mouth, tooth decay, gum disease and infections. These can make it difficult to eat, talk, chew or swallow, which can affect your health and quality of life and may cause treatment delays.

If possible, before treatment begins, visit the dentist to address any problems such as cavities, loose crowns or fillings or gum disease.

Tell your doctor about bleeding gums or white patches in your mouth. Both can be signs of infection. Infections that start in the mouth can spread to and affect other parts of the body.

Seven Ways to Take Care of Your Teeth and Mouth

1. Brush your teeth with an extra-soft toothbrush and a mild fluoride toothpaste 2 to 3 times a day.
2. Ask your doctor if it is okay to floss. If your platelet counts are low, flossing may increase the risk of bleeding. If your white blood cell count is low, flossing may increase the risk of infection. If your doctor approves, gently floss your teeth daily.
3. Rinse your mouth several times a day with warm salt water or baking soda and water.

GET ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT.

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society team consists of master's level oncology social workers, nurses and health educators who are available by phone Monday–Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (ET).

INFORMATION SPECIALISTS

- Call **800.955.4572**
- Visit www.LLS.org/InformationSpecialists

CLINICAL TRIAL NURSE NAVIGATORS

- Call **800.955.4572**
- Visit www.LLS.org/CTSC

Acknowledgement

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