

Skin care advice for patients receiving radiotherapy

Radiotherapy Department [Patient information](#)

During your radiotherapy and for a while afterwards, you may have skin changes in the area being treated. It may not be possible to stop a skin reaction but by following this advice you should feel more comfortable. Please talk to your treatment team if you are having problems and we will be able to give you advice.

You may notice:

- Your skin becoming pinker or darker.
- The skin may feel dry or tight, and sore.
- A rash may also appear and feel itchy.
- Sometimes the skin may blister or peel. If this happens you will be given creams or dressings to help.

A skin reaction may appear at any time but usually begins about 10 days after starting treatment.

What can affect my skin reaction?

- Having treatment to the head, neck or areas where there are skin folds can make your skin reaction worse. This includes the groin, breast, buttocks or armpit because they can be warm, moist and rub together.
- Having chemotherapy with radiotherapy can make your skin reaction worse.
- Smoking can make your skin reaction worse - if you need help to stop please ask for advice.

Skin care advice

Reduce friction by:

- Washing the skin gently in the treatment area with soap and water. Pat the skin dry and avoid rubbing the area.
- Wearing loose fitting, natural fibre clothing to reduce discomfort.
- Avoid shaving and waxing in the area.

Reduce irritation by:

- Using a moisturiser in the treatment area. One which does not contain sodium lauryl sulphate is better such as E45 cream. There is no need to wipe the moisturiser off before treatment.
- Stop the use of your usual deodorant if irritation occurs or skin is broken.
- Avoiding antibiotic creams unless there is a known infection.
- Avoiding sun exposure in the treatment area during radiotherapy. Use a high factor sun cream, following the completion of radiotherapy.
- Avoiding extremes of temperature such as heating and cooling pads.

Other advice:

- You may swim if your skin isn't broken. Shower after swimming to wash off the chlorine and apply your moisturiser. Please stop swimming if it irritates your skin.
- Avoid using products containing alcohol on the skin. This includes make up, hair dye, perfumes and aftershave.

If your skin breaks or blisters you should stop using moisturiser. Your treatment team will advise you further.

It may also help to keep up a good fluid intake and eat a well-balanced diet.

After your treatment has finished, your skin will continue to be more sensitive. Your reaction may worsen for the next 7-10 days before starting to improve. Most patients find their skin has healed 4 weeks after treatment ends. If the skin has broken, healing may take longer than this.

If you have any questions, please talk to your treatment team.

Contact details

Radiotherapy Helpline (DORAH)

Tel: **0300 019 2481**

The Dorset radiotherapy helpline (**DORAH**) is for any advice about any radiotherapy treatment you have had. It is open between 8.00 am to 5.30 pm but a message can be left at any time. It is important to note that the DORAH helpline is not for emergencies.

Oncology Patient Hotline - for urgent advice

Tel: **0300 019 4302**

This number can be used at all times of the day or night for urgent inquiries. In the event your call is not answered, please leave a message stating your name, hospital number and contact telephone number. You should be contacted by a nurse within 30 minutes. In the unlikely event that you are not called back within 30 minutes, please **call again**.

To read this leaflet in a different language,
please visit our website: www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets
and use the language and accessibility function available along the top of the site.

To ask for this leaflet in larger print, please contact the patient experience team on **0300 019 8499**
or email uhd.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

Poole Hospital, Longfleet Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 2JB

Robert White Radiotherapy Centre, Dorset County Hospital

Williams Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 2JY

Author: **Helen Payne** Date: **March 2026** Version: **Two** Review date: **March 2029** Ref: **201/23**

w: www.uhd.nhs.uk  @UHDTrust  @uhd_nhs

Some of our hospital services are moving.

Visit www.uhd.nhs.uk/future to find out more.