

## Self-Care after Completion of Head or Neck Radiation

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### Skin care

Your skin in your treatment area may look red, tan or darker for days or weeks. Dry, peeling skin is normal. **If you see sores, blisters or moist areas on your skin, call your doctor or nurse to discuss options.**

Treat your skin gently until it is fully healed. Do not scrub the area. Use skin care products that your doctor or nurse suggests for 1 to 2 weeks after treatments.

The skin that was treated may be more sensitive to the sun and sunburn easier.

- **Avoid prolonged direct sun exposure to your treatment area until it is fully healed. This often takes 3 to 4 weeks after radiation is over.** If you go outside, protect your skin from the sun by using sun protective clothing to cover the treatment area. Some companies that sell sun protective clothing online are Coolibar and UVSkinz. Choose clothing with a UPF rating of 50 or higher.
- Once your treatment area is fully healed, ask your radiation team when it is ok to start using sunscreen.
- Be careful with skin creams and sunscreens with active ingredients like retinol or salicylic acid because they may bother your skin. Avoid aerosol sunscreens because they may sting or burn and may not offer full protection. Sunscreens and skin creams for sensitive skin are best. Use sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 30 or higher. One resource for finding skin care products is the Environmental Working Group (EWG) Skin Deep website [www.ewg.org/skindeep](http://www.ewg.org/skindeep). You can use the site to search for products and see how they rate based on the science and safety of their ingredients.

Do not put anything on your skin that is very hot or cold, such as ice or heating pads, until your skin is fully healed.

## **Fatigue**

Fatigue is when you feel weak, worn out, tired or slow. It is a common side effect that should get better within a few weeks. To learn ways to help manage fatigue, ask your nurse for our fatigue handout.

## **Mouth care**

**Keep your mouth clean.** Brush your teeth, gums and tongue after each meal and at bedtime. Use toothpaste with fluoride and a soft toothbrush or sponge-tipped swab.

**Rinse your mouth often.** Mix  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon baking soda and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt into 1 cup of warm water. Swish and spit out the mixture a few times a day to help prevent dry mouth. Make a new mixture each day.

**Don't use mouthwash that contains alcohol.** Read labels closely. Many mouthwashes contain alcohol, which can hurt or burn your mouth.

**Tell your dentist at your next dental visit that you had radiation therapy.**

## **Diet**

If you were asked to follow a special diet during treatment, stay on it for several days after your treatment is done, or as directed by the dietitian. As your body recovers, try to eat healthy foods and increase your protein intake. For guidance, ask to talk with a dietitian.

If you were taking supplements or antioxidants before radiation, ask your nurse or doctor when you can restart taking them.

## **Follow-up care**

A follow-up visit with a radiation team member will be scheduled for you. Your doctor may also order blood work or testing that needs to be done before your visit.

## Resources and support

Once cancer treatment is done, it's normal to have different feelings. You may be relieved and glad it's over. You may also feel unsure or worried about what comes next. It can take time to recover, adjust and find out what's normal for you now. If you need help or support, please talk with a member of your cancer care team. These resources may help:

**Facing Forward:  
Life after Cancer Treatment**  
from the National Cancer Institute



**Nutrition and Physical Activity  
after Cancer Treatment**  
from the American Cancer Society



For a copy of these books, call our patient education office at 216-844-5432. To view online, visit [www.uhhospitals.org/seidmaneducation](http://www.uhhospitals.org/seidmaneducation) and scroll to the Support section or scan the QR codes.

## Reasons to call your radiation doctor or nurse



- Blisters or sores on your skin
- Unplanned weight loss
- Problems eating or swallowing
- Fatigue that is so bad that you cannot do your normal activities like getting dressed, bathing or making meals
- Questions or concerns
- If you are admitted to any hospital

Doctor name and phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.