

## INTRODUCTION

Radiation Therapy will usually affect the skin in the treatment area. When Radiation therapy is being given to any area of the body, it inevitably has to pass through the skin to get to the desired target. Fortunately, although the healthy skin tissue will react to the radiation initially, it will repair itself much better than tumour cells so most skin effects will be temporary. In fact, this ability for healthy cells to recover from radiation damage is one of the main reasons that Radiation Therapy tends to be delivered in a series of small 'fractions' over a number of days or weeks. This approach allows the skin and other sensitive healthy tissues to recover in between treatments.

Radiation Therapy can cause a reddening, drying, or scaling of the skin **within the treatment area**. This effect will be most

Your Radiation Therapist or nurse will review the following guidelines with you and will answer any questions you may have.

The most important point to remember is that Radiation Therapy will **ONLY** affect the area being treated. The following are some tips that should be followed in the treatment area to help reduce this potential side effect of your treatment.

Skin reactions will develop gradually over the course of your treatment and your Radiation Therapists, Nurses and Consultant will monitor any reactions closely and advise you on how to deal with any reactions that do occur.

DO NOT PUT **ANYTHING** ON THE SKIN  
WITHIN THE TREATMENT AREA THAT HAS  
NOT BEEN RECOMMENDED BY A MEMBER  
OF YOUR TREATMENT TEAM.

- Check the skin at the treatment site daily. Report any changes to your Nurse, Radiation Therapist or Radiation Oncologist.
- Do not use tape, bandages, or medicated patches in the treatment area.
- Do not shave or wax the treatment area. An electric razor may be used on the face if absolutely necessary.
- Do not use moisturisers, creams, talc, lotions, deodorants, fake tan or perfumes in the area being treated.
- Do not use a heating pad, hot water bottle, hot or cold compresses, or ice packs on the treatment area.
- Do not smoke. Smokers can tend to experience a worse skin reaction.
- The area being treated will always be more sensitive than the rest of your skin, continue to protect the area from sun exposure after your treatment ends.

pronounced when the site for treatment is close to the skin surface (for example, in the treatment of breast cancer, head and neck cancers, skin cancers and so on). In cancers of the pelvis or thorax, the skin reaction may be minimal because the radiation can be more easily targeted to deep seated lesions while protecting the skin.

Changes in your skin usually occur one to two weeks into treatment and may last a few weeks after the last treatment.

The amount of skin redness or irritation depends on the part of the body being treated and the dose of radiation.

#### HELPFUL HINTS FOR SKIN CARE

- Protect the skin in and around the treatment area from extremely hot or cold temperatures, especially in the summer and winter.
- Do not scrub or scratch at the skin in the treatment area.
- Eat a balanced diet and drink at least eight glasses of fluids daily unless your Doctor has restricted the amount of fluids you can drink due to another medical condition.

Completely cover the treatment area from the sun for up to 1 year after treatment has finished and ensure that factor 50 sunblock is used at all times thereafter while in the sun.

- Use warm water, rather than hot, to prevent your skin from becoming dry after bathing, pat the skin dry rather than rubbing it, especially at the treatment site. Allow the treatment area to air dry fully before dressing.

- Bath or shower only once a day. Bathe for only a short period of time, just long enough to cleanse yourself. Use a non-perfumed soap, such as Simple soap.
  - Avoid wearing tight clothes over the treatment area, and opt for loose fitting clothes made of natural fibres (like cotton) during treatment.
  - Avoid swimming (chlorine and chemicals in pools can be harsh on the skin).
- Any reactions you might experience during your treatment will gradually settle down in the days and weeks following your Radiation Therapy. During this time, it is advisable that you continue the skin care routine you followed during treatment. Normal care of the skin in the treatment area can resume once it no longer feels itchy or looks red.

**All the side effects relevant to your Radiation Therapy will be fully**

#### **USEFUL INFORMATION**

**Address:** UPMC Whitfield Cancer Centre,  
Cork Road, Co. Waterford

**Telephone:** 051337444

**Website:** [UPMCWhitfieldCancerCentre.ie](http://UPMCWhitfieldCancerCentre.ie)

## **SKIN CARE DURING RADIATION THERAPY**



**discussed with you before your treatment begins. You will also receive a separate leaflet regarding the specific area of your body that is having Radiation Therapy.**

**If you have any questions or problems at any time during your treatment, bring them to the attention of anyone on your radiation therapy team – they are the best people to advise and help you.**

