

PATIENT INFORMATION

Care of the skin during and after Radiotherapy to the head and neck

Radiotherapy can affect normal tissues in the treatment area leading to some common side effects. The most common is a reaction in the skin.

This reaction can appear 1-2 weeks after the treatment starts and, depending on your skin type and treatment dose, can be like a mild to severe sunburn.

If you are a smoker and continue to smoke during your treatment, your skin reaction may be worse.

Your skin in the treatment area can become sensitive and may even get dry and itchy. It is very important that the area is not rubbed, scrubbed or scratched.

No perfumes, lotions or aftershave can be used unless given to you by the staff in the department or your specialist nurse.

Treat your skin with care:

- You can wash your face and neck gently with aqueous cream or mild soap and warm water, pat your skin dry with a soft towel.
- Any moisturiser applied to the skin should not contain sodium lauryl sulphate.
- Do not 'wet shave', use an electric shaver if necessary.
- Avoid all hair removal products.
- Wash your hair with your usual shampoo, but do not use a hairdryer.
- Protect your skin from the sun during and after treatment by wearing a hat with a broad all round brim as your skin will be more easily damaged by the sun. Once radiotherapy is finished you will be advised to wear SPF of at least factor 50. You should avoid the midday sun between 11am and 3pm.
- Do not apply hot or cold packs e.g. electric blankets, hot water bottles or ice packs.
- Wear loose fitting, natural fibre clothing next to the skin. A silk scarf can be very helpful in protecting the skin on your neck from being rubbed by your clothes.
- You can swim as long as your skin remains unbroken. After swimming the area should be washed and dried gently and a suitable moisturising cream applied.

The effects on your skin will peak at about 10-14 days after the last treatment has been given. Skin healing can take 6 weeks to 8 weeks to complete and careful skin-care should continue during this whole period.

Contacts:

Macmillan Support Radiographer 01803 654273

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

Working with you, for you