

How to care for your skin during radiation therapy

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(HealthDay)—Proper skin care is crucial for cancer patients receiving

radiation therapy, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) says.

Itchiness, redness, blistering and peeling are among the [skin problems](#) that radiation therapy can cause.

"During radiation therapy, the treated skin becomes very sensitive, which can cause painful rashes and delays in care," said dermatologist Dr. Anisha Patel, from the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

"To reduce pain or discomfort from radiation therapy and increase your ability to continue treatment, it's important to consult a board-certified dermatologist prior to the start of any cancer therapies and avoid doing things that can further irritate the treated skin, such as spending time outdoors without [sun protection](#) or using harsh skin care products," Patel said in an AAD news release.

Here she offers several tips:

- **Cleanse properly.** Wash radiation therapy-affected skin gently daily with [warm water](#) in order to remove bacteria that can cause an infection. Use your hands to gently splash water on the treated area. Don't use a washcloth, sponge or loofah. If you need to cleanse, use a gentle, low-pH cleanser, and don't scrub at any lines drawn on your skin.
- **Skip the razor.** Don't shave affected skin.
- **Moisturize.** Apply moisturizer every day as directed. It can help your skin heal more quickly after treatment.
- **Choose skin products carefully.** Use fragrance-free makeup and skin care products. Fragrance can irritate your skin.
- **Choose comfort.** Wear loose-fitting clothes to prevent irritation. If receiving radiation treatment on your hands or lower arms,

wear gloves while doing dishes or other chores. For added protection, wear cotton liner gloves under rubber gloves.

- **Protect against the sun.** Radiation therapy can make your skin very sensitive to sunlight. Protect yourself by wearing loose-fitting, sun-protective clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, and using sunscreen.
- **Avoid extremes.** Don't expose treated skin to very hot or [cold temperatures](#) and don't apply anything sticky—including medical tape, stick-on bandages or nicotine patches.

"After radiation therapy, pay close attention to the skin that was treated, as [radiation therapy](#) can increase your risk of developing certain types of infections, as well as skin cancer," Patel said. "Some [side effects](#) can occur weeks, months or even years after your last radiation treatment—even if you had no side effects during treatment. If you see redness, a rash, or any other changes on your skin, call your oncologist or dermatologist."

More information: The American Cancer Society has more on [radiation therapy](#).

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