

Radiation Treatment for Skin Cancer

This information will help prepare you and your caregiver for your treatment.

What is Skin Cancer?

Skin cancer is uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. The main types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), melanoma, and Merkel-cell carcinomas (MCC). Radiation can be utilized after surgery to help ensure that all tumor cells have been killed. At times, it can be used in combination with immunotherapy.

Radiation Therapy

External Radiation: High-energy x-rays delivered from outside the body into a specified area designed by your treating physician. The radiation is shaped uniquely to cover each patient's disease and avoid normal anatomy. These outpatient visits are typically given daily over many weeks (Monday through Friday). You do not see or feel the radiation when you are getting each treatment. A person receiving external radiation is not radioactive and does not have to follow special safety precautions at home.

What to Expect

Some patients will develop side effects that usually occur within 1-3 weeks following the start of radiation therapy. You may experience some or all of the symptoms below, but they are usually temporary and will subside a few weeks after treatment is complete.

- Temporary skin changes might occur, including redness, dryness, peeling, and itching of the treated area; darkening of the skin in the treated area can also occur. The timing of the peak skin reaction varies, so please discuss with your physician. Healing often takes 3-4 weeks.

- Some patients report occasional warm sensations, tingling, or sharp pains in the treatment area. These sensations decrease slowly over time.
- Some patients may experience mild to moderate fatigue while undergoing treatment.

Side Effects

- Skin changes, such as redness, swelling, burning, peeling, itching, and changes in skin color (both lightening or darkening of the skin can happen)
- Hair loss in the radiation field
- Mild fatigue
- Telangiectasia: small blood vessel formation at the surface of the skin

Caution

- Report any skin changes such as weeping or bleeding to your physician, nurse, or therapist
- Avoid heating pads, hot tubs, or saunas while receiving radiation treatment
- **DO NOT** use makeup, perfumes, powders, or alcohol containing lotions in the area being treated
- **DO NOT** razor shave the area that is being treated

Care

Bathe and shower using warm water and a mild unscented soap such as Dove[®], Cetaphil[®], or Ivory[®]. Moisturize the skin that is being treated at least once a day (but not within 2 hours before your radiation treatment).

- **DO NOT** use a washcloth, scrubbing cloth, or brush when bathing
- Pat skin dry with a soft towel or allow to air dry
- **DO NOT** dye your hair or use color treatment products (i.e. color treatment shampoos and conditioners)
- Avoid tanning or burning your skin during and after treatment. If you do have to go outside during treatment, please cover the area that is receiving radiation treatment.

- Avoid extreme temperatures to the area being treated (hot tubs, heating pads, or ice packs)

Follow-Up Care

To increase the chance of finding a new or recurrent skin cancer as early as possible, please keep your routine follow-up visits.

Contact Us

For any questions or concerns, please reach out to the Radiation Oncology clinic on MyChart or call **214-645-8525**.