



## Dry Skin

Dry skin can be rough, flaky, red, and sometimes painful. It's often caused by not having enough oil and water in the layers of the skin. Common causes of dry skin include [dehydration](#)<sup>1</sup>, heat, cold, or poor nutrition. In cancer patients, dry skin can be a side effect of cancer treatments like [chemotherapy](#)<sup>2</sup>, [radiation therapy](#)<sup>3</sup>, [targeted therapy](#)<sup>4</sup>, and [stem cell transplant](#)<sup>5</sup>.

### What to look for

- Red, rough, flaky skin (although dry skin can look normal)
- Cracks in the skin
- Slight bleeding between the lines of skin covering joints, such as knuckles or elbows

### What the patient can do

- Put on moisturizing, alcohol-free creams twice a day, especially after baths.
- Add mineral or baby oil to warm bath water, or put it on after showering while skin is still damp. (This can make you and the floor slippery, so hold onto something when you're moving around barefoot.)
- Wash with cool or warm water, not hot water.
- Avoid scrubbing the skin during showers or baths. Gently pat skin dry after bathing.
- Avoid colognes, after-shaves, and after-bath splashes that contain alcohol.
- Use an electric razor.
- Drink 2 to 3 quarts of liquid a day, if you've been told it's OK to do this. Ask your cancer care team how much is safe to drink.
- Protect your skin from cold and wind. Avoid hot water and heat, especially dry heat.

- Ask your cancer care team what you can do to help relieve dry skin.

## What caregivers can do

- Help the patient put lotions or oils on hard-to-reach places.
- Offer extra fluids. Ask the cancer care team how much fluid is safe for the patient to drink.

## Call the cancer care team if the patient

- Develops very rough, red, or painful skin
- Has signs of infection, such as pus or tenderness near broken skin

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/eating-problems/fluids-and-dehydration.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/eating-problems/fluids-and-dehydration.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/radiation.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/radiation.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/stem-cell-transplant.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/stem-cell-transplant.html)

## References

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Brant JM, Stringer LH. Skin & nail alterations. In Brown CG, ed. *A Guide to Oncology Symptom Management*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Pittsburgh, PA: Oncology Nursing Society; 2015:599-

619.

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Hoffmann T, Corrêa-Fissmer <sup>(6)</sup> M, Duarte CS, Nazário <sup>(7)</sup> RF, Barranco ABS, Knipoff de Oliveira KW. Prevalence of dermatological complaints in patients undergoing treatment for breast cancer. *Anais Brasileiros de dermatologia*. 2018; 93(3): 362-367.

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