



PATIENT EDUCATION

Acute toxicity during skin radiation

A plain-language guide for patients and families. Bring this to your visit. It does not replace advice from your clinician.

Why these effects happen

Image-guided superficial radiation (IG-SRT) and other skin courses put almost all the dose in the skin and a shallow layer under it. Redness, dry peel, and a scab-like crust in the field are expected. Melanoma or node-field radiation goes deeper and can add swelling or throat/skin effects if the neck or a limb is treated. The goal is a healed surface, not a 'burn you must endure in silence.'

What often shows up by week

- Weeks 1 to 2: pinkness, itch, or tightness in the outline.
- Mid-course: dry peel or a moist center on a curved area (ear, nose, shin, fold).
- After the last session: the reaction can peak for 1 to 2 weeks, then slowly crust and fade.
- A limb or groin field can swell. A neck melanoma field can make swallow or saliva change if mucosa is near.

Confirm with your care team. Use only the ointment or dressing your skin team named. No hydrogen peroxide, no alcohol, no extra 'natural' oils. Confirm if you should pause a blood thinner only with the clinician who prescribed it.

What you can expect

- The Skin care printout pairs with this sheet. Makeup stays off an open field.
- Most IG-SRT fields heal over weeks. Deeper melanoma fields follow the anatomic sheet too (neck, axilla, groin).



Self-care and medicine pointers

- Wash with mild soap. Pat dry. Bland ointment as written. Air time helps a moist center.
- Sun: cover the field. No heating pad or ice pack on the outline.
- Itch: the steroid or antihistamine they wrote — not a numbing cream from the cabinet.

Monitor for (named conditions)

- **Acute radiation dermatitis** — pink, dry peel, or moist peel in the field.
- **Superinfection** — spreading redness, pus, fever, or a sudden bad smell.
- **Cartilage or shin ulcer** on ear, nose, or a thin-skinned shin field that will not close.
- **Contact dermatitis** from a product you added.
- **Limb edema** after an axillary or groin melanoma field.
- **Acute mucositis** if a neck field includes mouth or throat lining.

When to call the clinic vs go to the ER

- Same-day clinic: the field opens and weeps, pain jumps, or redness spreads past the outline.
- ER or 911: fever with rapidly spreading redness, or a face/eye field with vision change or a spreading orbital infection look.

Questions to ask

- What ointment do you want if this opens?
- When may I wet-shave or wear makeup again?
- Is this field likely to peak after the last visit?

How to schedule or learn more

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