

**Department of Radiation Oncology**  
**Department of Nursing**

# **Skin Care During Head and Neck Radiation Therapy**



# What is Radiation Dermatitis?

Radiation dermatitis is radiation induced skin changes. It is a common side effect of Radiation Therapy (RT).



## Causes of Radiation Dermatitis:

- Radiation dose
- Concurrent chemotherapy
- Pre-existing skin conditions
- Not compliance to skin care advice

## TYPES OF SKIN CHANGES

### Low Grade Skin Changes



#### 1. ERYTHEMA

- Pinkish/ dark red colored skin
- Skin feels warm or dry when touched
- Feels itching and mild discomfort



#### 2. DRY DESQUAMATION

- Skin may start to peel at skin fold area
- Skin turn darker in color
- May feel itching, sore or painful with/without swelling

## TYPES OF SKIN CHANGES

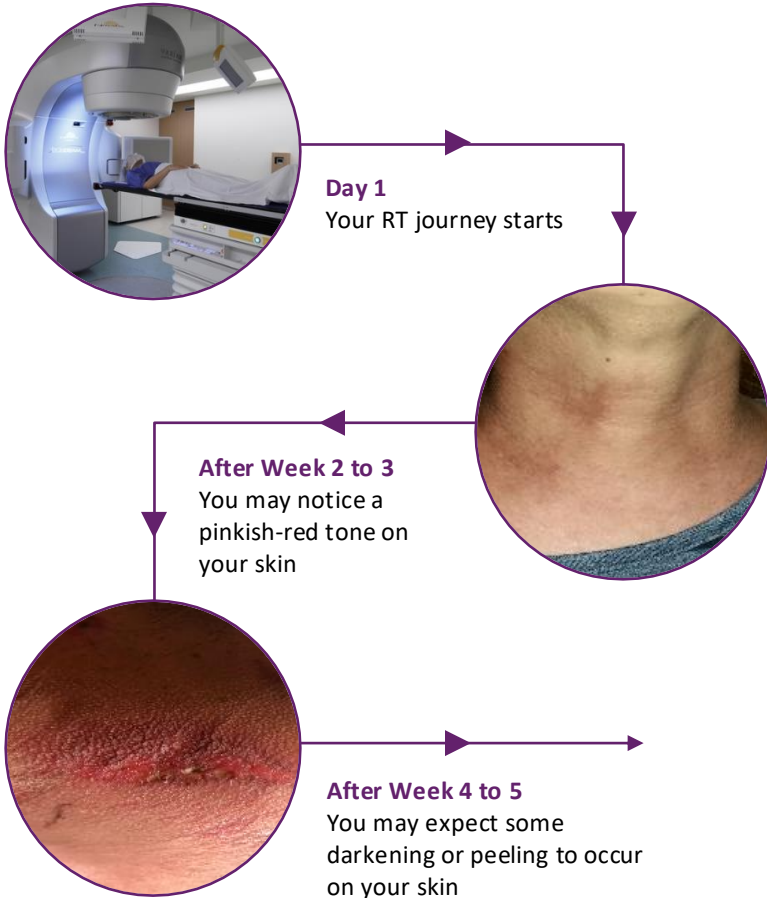
### High Grade Skin Changes

- Broken and blistered skin with/without discharges
- Skin become patchy, wet and crusted
- May have bleeding, pain or swelling



## SKIN CHANGES DURING AND AFTER RT

### Timeline for estimated skin changes



Your skin may worsen during treatment, but healing will start a few weeks after you have completed RT.

Therefore, it is important to take good care of your skin during and after RT to reduce the chances of skin changes.

## MANAGING SKIN CHANGES

**Skin changes are unavoidable but there are ways for you to cope with your condition.**

**Following the recommendations below will help in delaying any severe changes to your skin:**

- Wear loose, non-collar clothes
- Keep your treatment area clean and dry
- Use recommended skin moisturiser regularly
- Always wash your hands before you apply moisturiser
- Avoid sun exposure and swimming
- You may do light exercises that do not involve a lot of sweating
- Take prescribed medication for pain
- Do not scratch or rub your treatment area (especially during showers)
- Drink 6-8 glass of fluids daily
- Follow the dietary advice recommended by your dietitian
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol
- Communicate with your healthcare team and follow their instructions



**Please consult with your healthcare professional before using these skincare products.**

**Types of skin care products:**

**1. Moisturisers (To apply at least 2-4 times per day)**

- Emollients / water-based lotions or creams
- Hydrogels
- Barrier creams

**Note: Avoid perfumed products or aftershaves during RT.**

**2. Steroids creams - Prescribed by doctor**

Helps to reduce inflammation

(Apply thin layer on only affected area, do not use on broken skin)

**3. Silver Sulfadiazine cream (Antibacterial) – Prescribed by doctor**

For treatment and prevention of infection in open wounds during moist desquamation.

## SKIN CARE INSTRUCTIONS



**Your skin is fragile during RT.**

**Following skin care instructions is crucial in minimising skin changes.**

- Take short, lukewarm or cool baths/ showers
- Gently wash the treatment area with water and mild unscented soap
- Rinse well afterwards
- Gently pat skin dry with clean soft towel, do not rub or peel broken skin
- Use recommended non-perfumed/ non-scented skin care products
- Start applying moisturiser onto the treatment area from the first day of your RT session for at least twice a day
- Ensure your skin is clean and dry before application
- Do not apply moisturiser at least two hours before your RT session
- Moisturiser can be applied immediately after each RT session
- Recommend to continue skin moisturiser when RT completed



## Skin Care When moist desquamation occurs:



- **Step 1:** Soak your towel or non-scented wet wipes in a bucket of cool boiled water and squeeze out excessive water before use
- **Step 2:** Apply the clean and damp towel or wet wipes onto the affected area for **5 - 10 minutes**, repeat as many times as needed
- **Step 3:** Remove the damp towel or wet wipes after 5 -10 minutes and pat dry the area gently with a dry and clean towel

OR



- You may take shower and use mild soap and pat dry the area gently
- Do not peel or rub the broken skin

### ! Important Note:

- **Always wash the used towels and bucket with a disinfectant after every use**
- **Stop using moisturiser on broken skin**

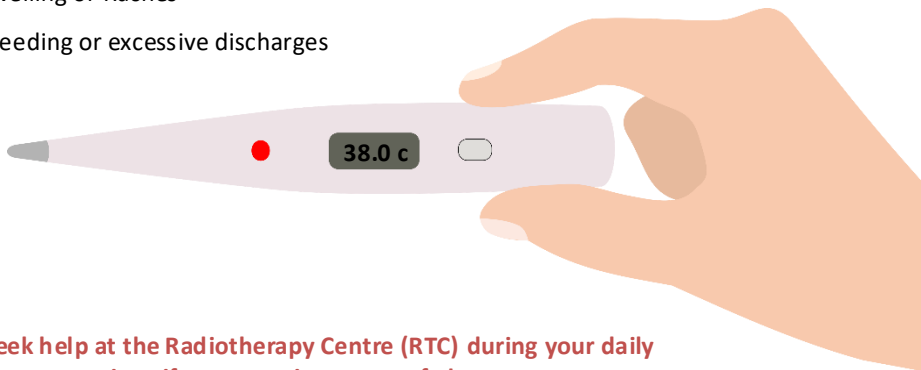
## SKIN CARE AFTER RT IS COMPLETED

**It is important to continue to care for your skin even upon completion of RT**

- If you only experience low grade skin changes (pink-red or dry skin), continue to apply moisturiser at least 3 times a day until your skin heals completely
- If the skin progresses into high grade skin changes (wet and broken skin), Inform your healthcare team, we will further advise you on the appropriate skin care advice.

## WHEN DO YOU SEEK HELP?

- If you develop a fever with temperature 38°C or higher
- When you experience one of the following:
  - Severe pain
  - Swelling or Rashes
  - Bleeding or excessive discharges



**Do seek help at the Radiotherapy Centre (RTC) during your daily treatment sessions if you experience any of above symptoms.**



Established in 2002, the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS) at TTSH RTC has state-of-the-art facilities and an internationally recognized team of radiation oncologists, radiation therapists, physicists, nurses and healthcare professionals.

Dedicated to providing holistic and specialized care, the team is committed to do their utmost best to deliver care for the prevention, management and cure of cancer.

For more details, visit  
[www.ncis.com.sg](http://www.ncis.com.sg) or  
scan the QR code



## GLOSSARY

<b>Radiation dermatitis</b>	Skin changes caused by radiation therapy
<b>Erythema</b>	Skin redness which may feel itchy and warm to touch
<b>Desquamation</b>	Damage to the surface of the skin
<b>Dry desquamation</b>	Dry and flaky skin
<b>Moist desquamation</b>	Wet and broken skin with some swelling

**A collaboration with NCIS at TTSH  
Radiotherapy Centre (Basement 3)**

Contact:  
6357 1070 (RTC)  
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