Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Skin Care for Cutaneous T-Cell Lymphoma

This information describes how to care for your skin if you have cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL).

It's important to take good care of your skin if you have CTCL. This can help prevent skin infections, ease uncomfortable symptoms, and help your skin look better. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions and the guidelines below to care for your skin.

General skin care guidelines

- Use an over-the-counter, unscented moisturizer at least once or twice a day. Examples include Vaseline®, Cetaphil ®, CeraVe ®, Eucerin ®, Aquaphor ®, Aveeno®, and Vanicream®. Apply the moisturizer while your skin is wet (such as after a shower or bath). This will help seal the moisture. This is called the soak and smear method.

- Take a short, lukewarm shower or bath every day. Limit showers and baths to 5 to 7 minutes. Spending too much time in water can dry out your skin. Only use unscented soaps such as Dove ®, Aveeno ®, or Cetaphil ®. After bathing, pat your skin dry with a towel and apply moisturizer while your skin is still wet.

- If you're using any topical medicines (medicines you apply on your skin), such as topical steroids, follow the instructions on the package and from your healthcare provider. They may also recommend the soak and smear method when applying them.

- Use a humidifier to keep moisture in the air, especially while you're sleeping.

Warm, dry air can make your skin dry and itchy. Clean your humidifier to help prevent mold. Follow the instructions it came with for help with this.

- Wear loose-fitting cotton clothing. Try to avoid fabrics such as wool because they may irritate your skin.
- Use unscented laundry detergent to wash your clothing. Avoid using other scented laundry products, such as fabric softeners and dryer sheets.
- Keep your fingernails short. This can help prevent cuts and lower your risk of infection if you scratch your skin.

Managing dry or itchy skin

If you have dry or itchy skin, follow the guidelines below. Make sure to also follow the guidelines in the ‘General skin care guidelines’ section.

- Tell your healthcare provider if your skin is itchy. They may give you a topical medicine (such as a topical steroid) to help manage it. If they do, follow the instructions on the package or from your healthcare provider.
- Use over-the-counter, anti-itch topical lotions with pramoxine, menthol, or camphor,such as Sarna® lotion.
- Use cool compresses or ice packs to help soothe itchy skin. You can keep these on your skin for 5 to 10 minutes at a time throughout the day.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you should take an antihistamine. Antihistamines are over-the-counter medicines that can help with itching. Examples include Benadryl®, Zyrtec®, Claritin®, and Allegra®. If you have severe itching, do not scratch. Tell your healthcare provider. They may prescribe another medicine.

Bleach baths

Your healthcare provider may recommend taking a bleach bath 2 to 3 times a week. Bleach baths can help soothe skin irritation and lower your risk of skin infections. They may be especially helpful if you have open sores or raw, itchy skin.

To take a bleach bath:

- Fill your bathtub with warm water.
- Add 1/4 cup (59 milliliters) of regular household bleach to a 20-gallon bathtub. Add 1/2 cup (118 milliliters) to a full, standard-sized bathtub.
- Check the bleach label before using it. If it contains more than 6% sodium hypochlorite, use less bleach. Ask your healthcare provider if you're not sure how much to use.
- Soak your body from the neck down, or only the affected areas, for 5 to 10 minutes. Do not get water in your eyes.
- Rinse your skin with clean water.
- Gently pat your skin dry with a towel.
- Apply a generous amount of moisturizer while your skin is still damp.

Skin biopsies

If you have CTCL, you may need to have skin biopsies during your treatment. A skin biopsy is a procedure to remove or test a suspicious area of skin or tissue. Caring for your wound after this procedure is important to help prevent infection and help you heal with little pain or discomfort.

For more information about caring for your wound after a biopsy, read our resource *Caring for Your Wound After Your Skin Procedure Without Sutures* (www.mskcc.org/pe/wound-care-without-sutures).

Contact your healthcare provider if you have:

- A fever of 100.4 °F (38 °C) or higher.
- Pain, redness, or swelling in any part of your skin.
- Any new, open sores.
- Foul smell or pus draining from open or cracked skin.
- Severe itching, such as itching that keeps you up at night or itching that won't stop.
- Dry eyes or a dry mouth.
- Skin issues that don't get better after following the suggestions in this guide.

Resources

For more information about CTCL, and information about treatment and support groups, visit the Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation's website www.clfoundation.org/mycosis-fungoides.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Skin Care for Cutaneous T-Cell Lymphoma - Last updated on July 26, 2026
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