

Rash

What is a rash?

A rash is an area of irritated skin. It can be a side effect of some cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy, or bone marrow/stem cell transplantation. There can be many different symptoms of a rash, including pimples and bumps, redness, tenderness, a feeling of warmth, and/or itching. Rashes tend to be mild to moderate. However, some people have severe rashes that cause major discomfort and changes to their appearance.

What should I do if I get a rash?

If you get a rash during cancer treatment, let your doctor know immediately. Don't try to treat it yourself. Avoid scratching it. Your doctor will examine your skin to find out what caused the rash. If the rash produces pus, a sample of the pus may be sent to a laboratory for examination. This helps the doctor figure out the right treatment to prevent infection.

How is a rash treated?

For a mild or moderate rash, your doctor may recommend an over-the-counter or prescription-strength corticosteroid cream that you rub into the skin to reduce inflammation. If the rash is severe or covers a large part of the body, your doctor may prescribe a corticosteroid to take by mouth, such as prednisone or dexamethasone (sold under multiple brand names). Your doctor may also recommend an antibiotic cream or an antibiotic taken by mouth to prevent a rash from becoming

infected. Over-the-counter pain medications, such as aspirin and acetaminophen (Tylenol), can help reduce pain caused by a rash. Antihistamine pills, such as cetirizine (Zyrtec) or diphenhydramine (Benadryl), can help with itching. Sometimes, your cancer treatment may be stopped for a short time or adjusted to a lower dose.

If these steps don't work, your doctor may recommend that you see a dermatologist, a doctor who specializes in skin conditions. Rashes generally go away after cancer treatment stops.

How can I manage the discomfort from a rash?

- Wear loose, soft, cotton clothing washed in mild detergent.
- Use perfume-free, mild soap and skin cleansers; use as little as possible.
- Keep the rash exposed to the air, when possible.
- Use a hypoallergenic, cream-based moisturizer to prevent skin dryness.
- Use lukewarm water when bathing instead of hot water. Pat your skin dry. Don't rub.
- Do not scratch. Cut your nails short.
- Avoid shaving over the rash.
- When outside, use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher and wear protective clothing.
- Stay hydrated. Drink about 8 cups of fluids, such as water, a day.
- Don't use makeup or use less.
- Don't use acne medications.

For more information and helpful videos, visit echoassociates.org/education

Source: American Society of Clinical Oncology

