

Skin reactions are a common side effect of chemotherapy and can present in several ways. The most frequently reported symptoms include:

- **Redness and inflammation**
- **Rash** (can be flat, bumpy, or acne-like)
- **Itching**
- **Peeling or excessively dry skin**
- **Sensitivity to sunlight**
- **Swelling, especially on palms and soles**
- **Darkening of the skin, particularly along veins used for IV chemotherapy**
- **Changes in nail color, brittleness, or cracking**[13678](#)

Hand-foot syndrome is a specific reaction that causes redness, swelling, and sometimes blistering on the palms and soles, and can be painful or cause tingling and burning sensations[56](#).

Photosensitivity (increased sensitivity to sunlight) is also common, making you more prone to sunburns[1378](#).

Rare but serious reactions such as Stevens-Johnson syndrome or toxic epidermal necrolysis can occur. These start with flu-like symptoms and progress to widespread rash, blisters, and skin peeling. These are medical emergencies and require immediate attention[2](#).

What you should do:

- **Notify your care team promptly** if you experience burning, pain, severe or sudden itching, hives, blisters, or difficulty breathing[123](#).
- **Protect your skin:** Use gentle, fragrance-free cleansers and moisturizers, avoid hot showers, and wear sunscreen and protective clothing outdoors[8](#).
- **Avoid scratching** to reduce the risk of infection.
- **Follow your oncologist's instructions** regarding any topical or oral medications for symptom relief.

Most skin reactions can be managed and often improve after treatment ends, but early intervention can prevent complications and improve comfort⁷⁸. If you are concerned about your symptoms or they worsen, contact your oncology team for further assessment and management.

1. <https://www.nm.org/conditions-and-care-areas/dermatology/skin-complications-from-chemotherapy/symptoms>
2. <https://cancer.ca/en/treatments/side-effects/skin-problems>
3. <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/skin-nail-changes>
4. <https://dermnetnz.org/topics/skin-toxicity-of-chemotherapy-drugs>
5. <https://share.upmc.com/2023/06/how-chemo-affects-skin/>
6. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/cancer-drugs/side-effects/skin-nails>
7. <https://www.nm.org/conditions-and-care-areas/dermatology/skin-complications-from-chemotherapy>
8. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/hair-skin-nails/rashes-skin-changes.html>