

## Skin care following radiotherapy to the breast

This information is to help you look after your skin after you have finished your course of radiotherapy.

It is important for you to know that the effects on your skin will carry on and may get worse for seven to ten days after you have finished your treatment. For a few patients this may continue for another two to three weeks. During this time your skin may become red, itchy and fragile. For these reasons you should continue to apply a mild unperfumed moisturiser to unbroken skin for at least 14 days. A **barrier cream** may help as it protects and also moisturises the skin. Examples of barrier creams are: **Cavilon, Derma-S and Sorbaderm.**

You may also find that during or after radiotherapy the skin in the area treated becomes broken and moist. If this happens during your treatment the nurses or clinic radiographers will be able to advise you and give you suitable dressings. When you have finished your radiotherapy you will need to:

- keep the area clean by washing it gently with water only (no soap or shower gel). Pat dry gently
- **contact the clinic radiographers** for advice. If necessary they will arrange an appointment to see you as soon as possible  
**or**
- **contact your GP or practice nurse.** It may be useful to show them this leaflet

**Hydrogel** is a gel that can help moisturise the skin. It can also have a cooling effect and provide temporary pain relief for up to six hours. Examples of hydrogels are: **Purilon gel, Intrasite gel, Actiform cool and Activheal hydrogel.**

It is also available as ready prepared **hydrogel dressings** which can be applied directly to the affected area. Examples are **Actiform Cool, and Kerralite Cool.**

Other products that could be used are **Flamigel** or **Flamazine.**

If the wound is very moist, an absorbent dressing may be suitable, with a non adhesive/silicone contact layer, for example **Silflex or Mepitel.**

Some foam dressings already have the non adhesive contact layer, for example **Mepilex border, Kliniderm foam silicone border and Allevyn gentle border.**

**Polymen foam** can help to reduce pain and discomfort and help to promote healing.

Any of these products are suitable. Continue to treat the broken skin until healed (usually for 10 - 14 days). Return to the clinic radiographers or your GP/practice nurse if you need more dressings or advice:

- **If you** need further advice or information please contact Mount Vernon Cancer Centre:  
**Outpatient Nurses:** 020 3826 2192  
Mon - Fri: 8.30am - 5.30pm  
**Clinic Radiographers:** 020 3826 2612  
or 07825 024058  
Mon - Fri: 8.00am - 4.30pm

### If using Hydrogel:

1. Clean the affected area by washing it gently with water only and pat dry gently.
2. Apply the gel to the affected area, or to a non-stick gauze dressing.
3. Cover the affected area with the dressing.
4. If possible, avoid using tape. If tape is needed to secure the dressing, use only silicone or paper tape. Make sure it is not applied to any sore or broken skin. Silicone and paper tape are available from your pharmacist.
5. Apply fresh dressings morning and evening.

### If using Hydrogel dressings:

1. Clean the affected area by washing it gently with water and pat dry gently.
2. Apply the dressing to the affected area.

- Cover with a non-stick gauze dressing.
- If possible avoid using tape. If tape is needed to secure the dressing, use only silicone or paper tape. Make sure it is not applied to any sore or broken skin. Silicone and paper tape are available from your pharmacist.
- Dressings can be left in place. Fresh non-stick gauze dressings should be applied morning and evening.

### If using an absorbent dressing and a non-adherent wound contact layer:

- Clean the affected area by washing it gently with water and pat dry gently.
- Apply the non-adherent wound contact layer (silicone layer) to the affected area.
- Cover with the absorbent dressing.
- If possible avoid using tape. If tape is needed to secure the dressing, use only silicone or paper tape. Make sure it is not applied to any sore or broken skin. Silicone and paper tape are available from your pharmacist.
- Silicone contact layer can stay in place for 7 days. Change the absorbent dressing as required.

### If using Foam or Polymem dressings:

- Clean the affected area by washing it gently with water and pat dry gently.
- Apply the dressing to the affected area.
- If possible avoid using tape. If tape is needed to secure the dressing, use only silicone or paper tape. Make sure it is not applied to any sore or broken skin. Silicone and paper tape are available from your pharmacist.
- Polymem dressings can be left in place for up to seven days.

If any dressings become stuck, soak them gently with water, patting dry in between dressing changes.

Return to the clinic radiographers or your GP/practice nurse if you need more dressings or advice.

- If you or your GP need further information please contact Mount Vernon Cancer Centre:
  - Outpatient Nurses:** 020 3826 2192  
Mon - Fri: 8.30am - 5.30pm
  - Clinic Radiographers:** 020 3826 2612  
or 07825 024058  
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### Other help and support

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time.

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, including the supportive services offered at the LJMC, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you and include healthcare professionals and trained volunteers. The centre provides a relaxed setting in which to talk and ask questions.

The LJMC is situated between the main Cancer Centre building and Gate 3 (White Hill).

 **Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre**  
... supporting people affected by cancer...

Services offered at the LJMC include:

- Drop-in centre
- Telephone helpline
- Benefits advice\*
- Complementary therapies\*
- Relaxation classes
- Counselling\*
- Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- The Way Ahead headwear workshops
- Self-help courses

\* These services are only available to NHS patients under the care of an oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Mon-Fri: **9.30am–4.30pm**

Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**

Website: **www.ljmc.org**