

# BRACHY NURSING TOPIC: SKIN HDR BRACHYTHERAPY- SKIN CARE GUIDE/PATIENT TEACHING POINTS

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**Disclaimer info: This is meant as an educational guide/tip sheet only. Always defer to your institution's policies and procedures and orders from the treating physician.**

Skin care education is important for patients undergoing skin HDR brachytherapy. It is best if this education begins prior to the start of patient's treatment course so that the patient's skin is in the best condition to receive HDR brachytherapy.

Cellular turnover rate in the skin is very fast, causing it to be particularly susceptible to the effects of radiation. The following may be expected with skin brachytherapy (and radiation therapy in general):

- Redness
- Pruritis
- Dry or peeling skin
- Moist reaction

Most skin changes will occur once the patient has had several fractions and they are well into their treatment course. It is important that the skin in the treatment area is assessed at the time of each treatment and documented. If there is concern regarding the site, the physician should be notified. Clinical photos (check your institution's policies) are also helpful in tracking skin in the treatment area before, during and after completion of treatment and should be considered.

Things patients can do to minimize skin reaction:

- Protect skin in the treatment area from the sun (before, during and after completion of treatment)
  - Hats
  - Long sleeved shirts
  - Long pants
  - Sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher
- Avoid putting makeup on treatment area
- Avoid scrubbing the skin
- Avoid itching or picking skin
- For intact skin - apply approved moisturizing creams that are free of fragrance, alcohol or harsh chemicals. There are many good creams available that patients and providers may trial.

Patients should be educated to contact their provider if they develop the following during or after treatment:

- Warmth or swelling in the treatment area
- Increasing pain in the treatment area
- Fever over 101 F
- Purulent drainage

Most skin reactions will improve in the first two weeks following completion of HDR brachytherapy treatments. It is important that the patient has a follow up with their physician after completion of skin HDR brachytherapy to ensure skin in the treatment area is healing and intact.