

Hand and Foot Syndrome (Palmar-Plantar Erythrodysesthesia)

What is Hand and Foot Syndrome?

- It is also called Palmar-Plantar Erythrodysesthesia.
- It is a side-effect of some chemotherapy treatments that affects the skin on your hands and the bottom of your feet.

What are the symptoms of hand-foot syndrome?

The first signs of hand and foot syndrome usually start two to three weeks after chemotherapy begins. You may notice tingling in the palms of your hands and / or the soles of your feet.

Other symptoms may include:

- Swelling and skin color changes in your hands and feet, mainly redness. It may look and feel like a sunburn.
- Swelling of your fingertips.
- Skin that feels tender to the touch or painful.
- Skin that blisters or peels.

Symptoms can range from minor skin changes with no pain to pain that keeps you from doing your normal daily activities.

How can I manage symptoms?

- Apply skin cream multiple times a day to keep your skin hydrated and protected. All creams should be unscented. It is recommended to use a cream that contains lanolin, a wool oil from sheep (Udderly Smooth® is one example).
- **If you are allergic to wool, or are vegan, use a Glaxal Base® cream.** These products are inexpensive and can be found at your local drug or grocery store or ordered online.
- Do not rub your skin. Pat your skin gently when applying lotion or using a towel to dry your hands.
- Take pain relievers as recommended by your cancer care team.
- Protect your skin from heat (e.g., no overly hot water temperatures).
- Protect your skin from household cleaning products (wear gloves when cleaning or doing dishes).
- Protect your skin from sun (e.g., use sunscreen and avoid sun exposure when possible).

- Soak your hands and/or feet in cold water or apply ice packs to your ankles or wrists for 15 minutes, 3 to 4 times per day if possible. **If you are taking oxaliplatin do not use cold water or ice packs.**
- Elevate your hands and feet. To elevate your hands, place them on a pillow when sitting.
- Use gentle, non-scented soaps and skin creams.
- Avoid hand sanitizer when possible and use a mild soap instead.
- Wear light, loose-fitting socks and shoes.
- Drink 6–8 glasses of fluids each day unless your cancer care team tells you otherwise.

When do I contact my cancer care team?

If you notice:

- skin color changes (redness or darkening of skin) and/or
- tenderness is worsening on the palms of your hands or the soles of your feet or,
- the skin on the palms of your hands or the soles of your feet are blistering or peeling.

*Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program
NSHCCP4062 © February 2024 Nova Scotia Health Authority
This pamphlet is for educational purposes only.
It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.
If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.*