

Radiation Therapy: Caring For Your Barrier Film

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What is a barrier film?

Your doctor may recommend using a barrier film (like Mepitel®) to help prevent radiation side effects to your skin during and after radiation treatment. A barrier film is a thin, clear, soft sheet made with silicone, that you place on your skin in the areas getting radiation treatment. It sticks gently to your skin to act like a protective barrier. The film is breathable and flexible, so it moves with your skin and stays comfortable during treatment. It does not affect your radiation treatment.

Barrier films can:

- Reduce redness and irritation.
- Help stop peeling or sores.
- Keep your skin more comfortable.
- Protect your skin so your treatment can continue.

It is important that you use the right barrier film recommended by your healthcare team. Not all dressings or films will protect your skin during radiation treatment. Using the wrong product might not help and could even cause skin problems.

Do not use a barrier film:

- If you are allergic to any of the ingredients.
- On open cuts or broken skin.
- If your healthcare team tells you not to.
- If your skin is blistered, or infected.

A member of your healthcare team will do your first barrier film application. You will lie down in the same position as your radiation treatment and then the film will be applied. You may need to repair and replace your barrier film at home. Another set of helpful hands will be beneficial to apply. If you do not have anyone that can help, let your health care team know.

When to Replace your Barrier Film

The barrier film can stay on your skin as long as it is not damaged and feels okay. Always follow the advice from your healthcare team and check your skin often.

Replace your barrier film when:

- Your healthcare team tells you to.
- The film comes off or starts lifting.
- The edges are peeling a lot.
- The film gets dirty.
- The film feels uncomfortable.

How to Remove your Barrier Film

- Stand under a warm (not hot) shower to soak the film.
- Slowly peel the film back, keeping it close to your skin as you pull.
- Once the film is off, gently wash the area with mild soap and pat it dry.
- Check your skin. If it looks sore, red, or wet, talk to your healthcare team before putting on a new film (you can bring your barrier film to your next radiation treatment appointment).

Prepare to Apply the New Film

- Clean your work area with liquid soap and water or disinfecting wipes.
- Clean your hands using soap or hand sanitizer.
- Gather your barrier film and a pair of clean scissors.
- Lie down in the same position you use for your radiation treatments.
- You will start at the top of the treatment area and work your way down.
- Begin on the outside of the body (side) and move toward the middle of the body.
- You will put the barrier film in the same area where your healthcare team put the first one. If you are unsure, ask your healthcare team.

Apply the New Film

- To help it stick better, warm the film by holding it flat between your hands for about 20 seconds before taking off the back of the film.
- Peel off half of the paper on the back of the film.
- Place the top edge of the film at the top of the treatment area.
- Gently let the film fall down onto the skin. Do not pull or stretch the film.
- Peel off the rest of the paper on the back.
- Press the film smoothly onto the skin.
- Take off the paper frame around the outside of the film.
- Gently press out any air bubbles.
- Apply additional sheets as needed. Do not overlap sheets by more than 1cm.
- Look over all areas to make sure they are covered.
- Gently press out any small air bubbles.

Caring for your Barrier Film

Clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wear loose, soft clothes to avoid rubbing.
Showering / bathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The barrier film is waterproof, and you may shower.• When showering, face away from the water. Use a hand towel to cover the barrier film. Try to avoid direct water spray to the area.• Do not soak in baths, use hot tubs, or swim.• Pat the film gently to dry. Avoid rubbing the area with your hands or towels.
Lotions / creams	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not use creams, powders, or deodorants near the film unless your healthcare team says it is okay.• Creams can cause the barrier film to lift off your skin.
Shaving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not shave over or near the film
Heat / cold	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not use heating pads, hot packs, or ice packs on top of the film.• Keep the skin being treated with radiation covered from the sun, wind, and cold.
Exercise / sweat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sweating a lot from exercise can make the film peel or lift off.• Try to avoid sweating too much while wearing the film.
Do not scratch or peel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leave the film in place, even if the edges start to lift or peel on their own.
Peeling / lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the edges begin to peel, press the film gently to re-stick. If that does not work, carefully trim the edges with scissors.• If needed, you can cut a new piece of film and place it over the trimmed edge. Overlap each piece by about 1 cm.

You should contact your healthcare team if:

- You cannot get the new film to stay in place.
- Your skin under or around the film gets red, blistered, wet, or painful.
- You feel more itching, burning, or swelling.
- You notice signs of infection, like pus, spreading redness, warmth, fever, or chills.

After Treatment

It is very important to keep wearing the barrier film for at least 14 days after your radiation treatment ends. During this time, take care of the film the same way you did during treatment. Your skin might not react right away after radiation. It can take a few days for signs of irritation to show up. Usually, the skin feels worst about 7 to 10 days after your last treatment. Keeping the barrier film on during this time can help protect your skin.

For more information on how to care for your skin when the film has been removed, please read the NS Health patient education pamphlet titled Skin Care During Radiation Treatment:

<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSHCCP4076>.

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Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program

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