Hand Foot Syndrome During Cancer Therapy

Skin changes on the palms of your hands and bottom of your feet can happen with some cancer treatments. This is known as **Hand Foot Syndrome (HFS)**. These skin changes can happen at any time during treatment. HFS is more likely to appear as treatment goes on and the effects of the medicines build up.

HFS starts with a tingling on the palms of your hands and the bottom of your feet. These areas can become red, cracked and dry as treatment goes on. The palms of your hands and bottom of your feet may also feel more sensitive or tender and become painful. Early treatment of HFS can help keep symptoms from getting worse.

Your doctor may need to stop your chemotherapy until the symptoms improve or change your chemotherapy dose for future treatments. This does not mean your chemotherapy will be less effective.

Signs of Hand Foot Syndrome

It is important to tell your health care team right away to prevent Hand Foot Syndrome from becoming a bigger problem. **Call your doctor if you have any of the following:**

- Redness
- Swelling
- Flaking, cracking, dryness or peeling of the skin
- Small blisters, sores, or bleeding
- Tingling feeling, burning, numbness, or itching
- Tenderness or pain
- Calluses

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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Things You Can Do to Help Prevent HFS

Here are ways to help prevent or reduce symptoms of HFS:

- Your doctor may suggest using a Diclofenac 1% gel on your hands and feet twice daily while taking cancer medicine that causes HFS. This gel is available over the counter without a prescription, but your provider may send a prescription to your pharmacy since you will need a large amount.
- Alternatively, your doctor may suggest using a cream that has 10 to 40 percent urea on your hands and feet twice daily. Examples include: Udderly Smooth Extra Care 20, Ebanel 40% urea cream, and Eucerin UreaRepair Plus. These are all available over the counter without a prescription.
- Do not do activities that increase friction and heat to your hands and feet such as repeatedly rubbing your hands together, or walking barefoot on hot sand or pavement.
- Do not use hot tubs or saunas.
- Do not put your hands or feet in hot water or take a long hot shower or bath.
- Be careful with exercises or activities that increase pressure on your feet or hands such as clapping, jogging or weight lifting.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Protect your skin from the sun with clothing and sunscreen. **Use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher that has no fragrance and is labeled "hypoallergenic".**
- Wear shoes and clean socks that fit well to prevent friction and skin irritation. Wear slippers at home.
- Do not stand for long periods of time.
- Do not cut, chop or use tools that can cause friction to the palms of your hands.
- Dishwashing gloves should not be worn because the rubber will hold heat against your palms.

Treatment for Hand Foot Syndrome

Here are some ways to treat the symptoms of HFS:

- Do not rub the areas. Gently use moisturizing lotions and soap. Use soap, lotions and creams that are free of perfumes or fragrance.
- During hours you are awake you may use other lotions as often as you would like to keep your skin soft and moisturized. These lotions include Gold Bond, Lubriderm, Cetaphil, CeraVe, Nivea and Aveeno.
- At bedtime you may use thicker lotions from a jar (that you scoop) such as Eucerin, Aquaphor or Udderly Smooth. After you apply the lotion, put on cotton gloves or cotton socks over your hands or feet. This will let the lotion work and keep your skin moisturized. It is very important to prevent the skin on your hands and feet from becoming too dry.
- If your hands or feet become swollen and very painful, your doctor may order an anti-inflammatory drug such as celecoxib or a steroid cream such as clobetasol, to use on your hands or feet.
- A cool bath or putting gel ice packs (or a package of frozen vegetables) on the area may help. **Ask your doctor before using cooling treatments.** Cooling the hands and feet decreases blood flow and may reduce symptoms.
- Elevate your hands and feet when possible.
- Talk with your doctor about the use of pain medicine to help treat symptoms.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.