

## Rash

### What is a rash?

Rashes are areas of irritated skin. They can be a common side effect of chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and radiation therapy. Symptoms of a rash can include pimples and bumps, dryness, sores, redness, tenderness, a feeling of warmth, itching, and stinging. Rashes can be mild or severe enough to affect a person's daily life. For some, a rash is hard to cope with because it causes visible changes to the body. Your doctor can help you manage a rash so you can continue treatment.

### Which drugs can cause a rash?

Most people taking targeted therapy drugs directed at the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) develop a rash on the face and upper body. These drugs include afatinib (Gilotrif), cetuximab (Erbix), erlotinib (Tarceva), gefitinib (Iressa), lapatinib (Tykerb), panitumumab (Vectibix), and vandetanib (Caprelsa). People taking sorafenib (Nexavar) or sunitinib (Sutent) can develop a rash that causes a warm or burning feeling on the face or scalp. With vemurafenib (Zelboraf), people may develop flat red spots on the upper body and face. Ipilimumab (Yervoy) can cause red bumps on the face and torso, as well as itching on the legs or entire body. People taking everolimus (Afinitor) or temsirolimus (Torisel) may develop a bumpy rash on the arms and legs. Rashes generally go away after treatment stops.



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### How is a rash diagnosed?

It's important to tell your doctor if you develop a rash during treatment. Do not try to treat a rash yourself. Your doctor will do a physical examination of your skin to find out the rash's cause. Because rashes can change quickly, it can help to bring a photo of your rash to your appointment. If a rash causes pus to come from the skin, your doctor may send a sample of the pus to a laboratory to determine the right treatment to prevent infection.

### How is a rash treated?

For a mild or moderate rash, a corticosteroid cream you rub into the skin can reduce inflammation. Your doctor may also recommend an antibiotic cream or antibiotic taken by mouth to prevent infection caused by scratching. For more severe rashes, corticosteroids, such as prednisone or dexamethasone (multiple brand names), may also be given by mouth. Over-the-counter pain medications, such as aspirin and acetaminophen (Tylenol) can also relieve pain associated with a rash. Sometimes, chemotherapy may be stopped for a short time and started at a lower dose. If these steps don't work, a drug called isotretinoin (multiple brand names) may help manage a rash. Because UV (ultraviolet light) can trigger a rash or make it worse, you should protect your skin from the sun during treatment. Also, don't use common anti-acne treatments that contain alcohol, retinoids, or benzoyl peroxide because they can increase skin irritation.

## Questions to ask the doctor

Regular communication is important for making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your health care team:

- Is a rash a potential side effect of my treatment plan?
- If I get a rash, should I stop my treatment?
- Should I see a dermatologist?
- What medications can help manage my rash?
- What are the instructions for using or taking these medications?
- Do these medications have any side effects?
- What are the costs of these medications?
- Who can help me with concerns about the costs of these medications?
- Are there medications I should avoid using when I have a rash?
- Besides medications, are there other steps I can take to manage the rash and my discomfort?
- Whom should I call with questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Find additional information on rash and other side effects at [www.cancer.net/sideeffects](http://www.cancer.net/sideeffects).

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Analgesics:**

Over-the-counter medications that relieve pain

### **Antibiotics:**

Medications that fight bacterial infections

### **Antihistamines:**

Medications used to treat an allergic reaction

### **Chemotherapy:**

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

### **Corticosteroids:**

Medications that reduce inflammation in the body

### **Dermatologist:**

A doctor who specializes in diseases and conditions of the skin

### **Epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR):**

A molecule that fuels the growth of cancer cells

### **Radiation therapy:**

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

### **Radiodermatitis:**

A rash caused by radiation therapy

### **Symptom management:**

The relief of side effects, also called palliative or supportive care

### **Targeted therapy:**

Treatment that targets specific genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth and survival

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