

Hand-Foot Syndrome

What Is Hand-Foot Syndrome?

Hand-foot syndrome is a side effect of some types of chemotherapy. Hand-foot syndrome happens when a small amount of the drug in tiny blood vessels leaks into the surrounding skin.

There are many drugs that can cause hand-foot syndrome. Some examples include:

- Capecitabine (Xeloda®)
- Cytarabine
- Liposomal doxorubicin (Doxil®)
- Doxorubicin (Adriamycin®)
- Fluorouracil
- Sorafenib (Nexavar®)
- Sunitinib (Sutent®)
- Pazopanib (Votrient®)
- Vemurafenib (Zelboraf®)

Not everyone who takes these drugs will get hand-foot syndrome. Hand-foot syndrome may occur within weeks of starting treatment, but may also take months to occur.

Signs of Hand-Foot Syndrome

Watch for these signs in the soles of your feet and palms of your hands:

- Blisters
- Burning
- Peeling
- Pain
- Redness
- Swelling
- Tingling

Preventing Hand-Foot Syndrome

Exposing your hands and feet to hot temperatures, friction, and chemicals can trigger hand-foot syndrome or make it worse if you already have it.

Follow these tips:

DO

- Avoid hot water on your hands and feet. Use warm water to wash. Take warm showers or baths.
- Pat dry with a towel to prevent friction.
- Gently rub thick moisturizing cream on your hands and feet each day. Use a cream without alcohol or perfumes. At bedtime, use a thick layer of moisturizing cream and cover the hands and feet with cotton gloves and socks while you sleep.
- Elevate hands and feet when you can.
- Wear loose clothes and shoes that let air move around your feet.
- If you need to wear rubber gloves, make sure they have an inside lining.
- Talk with your cancer care team about using ice packs on wrists and ankles during chemotherapy.

DON'T

- Don't let your skin get hot. Avoid hot tubs, saunas, and sitting in the sun.
- Don't do things that cause too much force or friction. These include home chores such as sweeping and mopping. Also avoid jogging, aerobics, and racquet sports.
- Don't use harsh cleaning chemicals.
- Don't use tools that require hand force, such as screwdrivers and knives.
- Don't carry heavy objects such as grocery bags.

When Should I Call My Doctor?

Call your cancer care team right away if you see any signs of hand-foot syndrome. They can help with treatment and pain relief.