



Hand-foot Syndrome

What is hand-foot syndrome?

- Hand-foot syndrome is a side-effect of some chemotherapy. It is also called Palmar-Plantar Erythrodysesthesia or PPE.
- It affects the skin on your hands and the bottom of your feet.
- It usually starts with tingling or swelling of your skin and can become painful, red and numb.
- In worse cases, your skin may start to peel and you can get blisters or sores.
- Hand-foot syndrome can be uncomfortable and can stop you from doing your daily activities.

Talk to your healthcare team if you need help managing hand-foot syndrome.

How do I prevent hand-foot syndrome?

Your healthcare team will tell you if you are taking anticancer medication (like chemotherapy) that puts you at risk of getting hand-foot syndrome.

You can help to prevent sore skin by doing these things:

- Keep your skin moist, especially in the skin folds. Gently apply moisturizer cream or lotion to the inside of your hands and bottom of your feet as needed. Choose a fragrance-free cream that contains lanolin (like Bag Balm®, Udderly Smooth®) or urea 10% (like Uremol 10®).

- Do not let your hands and feet get too hot. Wash sweat from your skin. Bathe or shower in lukewarm water and gently pat yourself dry.
- 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.
- Do not do activities that cause rubbing or pressure on your skin, like heavy-duty washing, gripping tools, typing, playing musical instruments and driving.
- Do not apply tight bandages or adhesive tape to your skin.
- Wear gloves while cleaning to protect your skin from things like laundry detergent, bleach, cleaning products, and dish soap.
- Wear loose fitting clothes and loose fitting, comfortable shoes with cushioned soles. Do not walk in bare feet.
- Drink 6–8 glasses of liquids each day unless your healthcare team told you otherwise.

What can I do to reduce the symptoms of hand-foot syndrome?

Cold therapy:

- If you are taking the drug oxaliplatin, do not use cold to treat your hand-foot syndrome.
- Cover an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables with a towel and place it on your palms or the soles your feet. Alternate on and off for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.
- Do not apply the cold directly to your skin.
- You may also use cooled gel insoles in your shoes for your feet.

Lotions:

- Put on moisturizing creams or lotions very gently. Avoid rubbing your skin.
- If you get blisters or sores, use a fragrance-free lotion on your hands and feet.
- Your doctor may also prescribe a cream or ointment to help your sores heal.

Pain relievers:

- Over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may help to reduce pain. Check with your healthcare team for the right dose for you.
- Do not use pain relief or allergy (Benadryl®) creams. They can irritate your skin.

Corticosteroids:

- If you are getting chemotherapy through an IV (intravenous) every 3 to 4 weeks, your doctor may prescribe a corticosteroid (like dexamethasone) to treat and prevent hand-foot syndrome.

Treatment changes:

- Your chemotherapy treatments may need to be stopped for a time or your dose may be changed by your doctor to prevent your hand-foot syndrome from getting worse.

When do I contact my healthcare team?

- If you notice that your palms or the soles of your feet become red or tender, tell your healthcare team right away.
- These signs usually happen first before the hand-foot syndrome gets worse and starts to peel or blister.