What Is Hand-Foot Syndrome?

Hand-foot syndrome is a side effect of some chemotherapies. Hand-foot syndrome happens when a small amount of the drug in the capillaries (tiny blood vessels) leaks into the surrounding skin. This causes redness, swelling, peeling, blisters, and pain in the soles of the feet and palms of the hands. It can also cause tingling, burning, and sometimes difficulty walking.

These chemotherapies have been associated with hand-foot syndrome:

- Capecitabine
- Cytarabine
- Doxil
- Doxorubicin
- Fluorouracil
- Sorafenib
- Sunitinib
- Pazopanib
- Vemurafenib

Not everyone treated with these chemotherapies will get hand-foot syndrome. But if you are being treated with one of these chemotherapies, you may be at risk. Watch for these symptoms:

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

Severe hand-foot syndrome can cause serious infections. Tell your doctor right away if you have symptoms.

Preventing Hand-Foot Syndrome

Exposing the 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**

- Limit exposure of hands and feet to hot water.
- Take cool showers or baths.
- Pat dry with a towel to prevent friction.
- Gently apply thick moisturizing cream to hands and feet daily.
- Elevate hands and feet when possible.
- Wear loose-fitting, well-ventilated clothes and shoes.
- If you need to wear rubber gloves, make sure they have an inside lining.
- Place ice packs on wrists and ankles during chemotherapy. (Discuss this with your doctor first.)

**DON’T**

- Don’t expose skin to heat, including hot tubs or saunas or sitting in the sun.
- Don’t do activities that cause excessive force or friction, such as jogging, aerobics, and racquet sports.
- Don’t use harsh cleaning chemicals.
- Don’t use tools that require hand force, such as screwdrivers and knives.

When Should I Call My Doctor?

Call your doctor right away if you notice symptoms. Your doctor will provide treatment options and pain relief options.

The length of time you will have hand-foot syndrome depends on the patient, type of chemotherapy, and treatment. Your doctor will tell you more about what you can expect.