This sheet discusses possible side effects to your skin from radiation therapy and how to manage them.

Effects of Radiation on the Skin
The effects of radiation on the skin depend on a number of factors:

- Number of treatments
- Total dose of radiation
- Body part being radiated
- Prior sun exposure of the radiated skin
- Your general health

After 10 treatments some people do not notice any change in their skin from the radiation. However, after 30 treatments, all people experience some degree of skin reaction. This may include dryness, redness, peeling, tenderness, itching, or blistering. Skin reactions happen gradually and may continue for a while after treatments end. Most effects are temporary and resolve after two to four weeks.

What Can I Expect?
Skin reactions happen only in areas where the radiation enters and exits your body. Ask your doctor if you are unsure where your treated areas are.

After a week or two of treatments, your skin will start to become dry. It may darken, turn pink to red, itch, or feel tender. You should take care of your skin from the first day of radiation, before you notice changes.

After about two weeks, you will lose hair in the treated area. Hair usually begins to grow back within three to six months after treatment ends. Hair loss may be permanent and depends on the dose of radiation you receive.

Symptoms may go on after your last treatment. If you have questions or need help with a skin problem, ask your health care provider.

How Can I Protect My Skin?
Here are some guidelines to help protect your skin:

- Wash skin gently with warm water. Do not scrub. Use your hand rather than a washcloth and pat dry with a soft towel.
- Use a mild soap that is free of perfumes or deodorants.
- Wear loose-fitting cotton clothes. Do not wear tight-fitting clothes that can cause friction.
- Avoid extreme heat or cold on the skin. Do not use heating pads, ice packs, or hot water bottles on the treated skin.
- Avoid exposing treated skin to the sun; it will be more sensitive. Use a PABA-free sunscreen with at least SPF 30 when outdoors, wear a wide-brimmed hat, and avoid tanning beds.
- Use only an electric razor if you shave within the treated area.

What Can I Do?

- Apply a moisturizing cream, lotion, gel, or oil to radiated skin. Choose products for sensitive skin, and avoid products with perfume or deodorant.
- If a product stings, stop using it.
- If your skin becomes tender or itchy, try using an over-the-counter one-percent hydrocortisone cream. If necessary, your health care provider may prescribe a steroid cream.