

Cancer and Ichthyosis

Overview

People living with ichthyosis sometimes wonder whether their condition increases their risk for cancer or how cancer treatments might affect their skin. While cancer itself is **not more common** in most forms of ichthyosis, certain **skin changes, chronic inflammation, and some treatments** can create unique challenges.

This resource outlines what is currently known and how to manage skin health during cancer prevention, treatment, and recovery.

Ichthyosis and Cancer Risk

- **Most individuals with ichthyosis do not have an increased risk of cancer.**
 - However, some **rare inherited types**—especially forms involving chronic inflammation, scarring, or blistering—may carry a **slightly higher risk of developing skin cancer** (such as squamous cell carcinoma) in areas of long-term irritation or wounds.
 - Regular dermatologic care and skin monitoring are the best ways to detect and prevent complications early.
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Skin Cancer Awareness

Watch for Warning Signs

If you notice any of the following changes, contact your dermatologist promptly:

- New or changing growths or lesions
- Sores that do not heal
- Thickened, painful, or crusted patches that look different from your usual scaling
- Bleeding or ulcerated areas

Routine **skin checks once or twice per year** are recommended for anyone with chronic skin disease.

Cancer Treatment and the Skin

Cancer therapies—such as **chemotherapy, radiation, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy**—can affect skin barrier function. For people with ichthyosis, this can worsen dryness, scaling, or sensitivity.

Common Effects

- Increased **dryness and peeling**
- **Itching or burning** sensations
- **Cracking or fissures** (especially on hands and feet)
- **Rash or redness** related to certain medications

Tips for Managing Skin During Treatment

- Use **mild, fragrance-free cleansers** and **thick emollients** (ointment or cream-based) multiple times per day.
- **Avoid harsh exfoliants or scrubs** during treatment.
- **Apply moisturizer within 3 minutes** of bathing to seal in moisture.
- If your skin becomes **painful, weepy, or infected**, notify your oncology or dermatology team right away.
- Keep your care team informed—oncologists can adjust medications or refer to dermatology for supportive care.

Medications and Drug Safety

- **Retinoids (acitretin, isotretinoin):** These are sometimes used to treat ichthyosis, but may not be appropriate during cancer treatment. Discuss timing and alternatives with your oncologist and dermatologist.
- **Steroid creams:** Can be used for irritation but should be applied cautiously on thin or sensitive areas.
- **Supplements and herbal remedies:** Always clear these with your oncology team, as some may interfere with treatment.

Radiation and Ichthyosis

- Radiation can cause **localized dryness, redness, and peeling**, especially in people whose skin barrier is already compromised.
- Protect the treated area from friction, avoid scratching, and use only **products approved by your radiation team**.
- After treatment, continue gentle skin care until the area heals completely.

Coping and Emotional Health

Dealing with both ichthyosis and cancer can be overwhelming. Fatigue, changes in appearance, and treatment side effects may affect self-image and confidence.

- Reach out to **FIRST's Peer Navigator Program** to connect with others living with ichthyosis.
- Ask your oncology team about **psychosocial support services**, such as counseling or support groups.

When to Contact Your Doctor

- New or rapidly changing skin lesions
- Signs of infection (redness, warmth, pus, pain)
- Uncontrolled itching or cracking
- Worsening dryness that interferes with sleep or daily activity
- Concerns about medication interactions or side effects

Helpful Resources

- **FIRST – Foundation for Ichthyosis & Related Skin Types**
www.firstskinfoundation.org
Email: info@firstskinfoundation.org
- **American Academy of Dermatology (AAD)**
www.aad.org – Skin cancer prevention and care
- **American Cancer Society (ACS)**
www.cancer.org – Reliable information on cancer types and treatments

CancerCare

www.cancercare.org – Free support services and counseling for patients and families

This Adult Toolkit Resource brought to you by:



This information is provided as a service to patients and parents of patients who have ichthyosis. It is not intended to supplement appropriate medical care, but instead to complement that care with guidance in practical issues facing patients and parents. Neither FIRST, its Board of Directors, Medical & Scientific Advisory Board, Board of Medical Editors, nor Foundation staff and officials endorse any treatments or products reported here. All issues pertaining to the care of patients with ichthyosis should be discussed with a dermatologist experienced in the treatment of their skin disorder.



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Improve lives and seek cures for those affected by ichthyosis and related skin types.

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