Emotions & Skin Rash

Skin rash is not only physically uncomfortable but emotionally difficult as well. It’s not unusual to feel self-conscious about the appearance of your skin during treatment. The best way to tackle these feelings is to talk to your doctor about what kind of medications are available to reduce the rash. Your care team can suggest skin care and makeup solutions as well.

Remember that you are not alone with this side effect, and that the symptoms are temporary: skin rash signs and symptoms usually resolve within a month after treatment ends.

What is Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor?

Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR) is located on cells in the body, including tumor cells and many types of skin cells. Sometimes these cells are signaled to divide and grow, which can become cancer tumors.

Anti-EGFR therapies are medications that can slow cancer cell growth by blocking the cell’s EGFR from receiving the signal to grow. Cetuximab (Erbitux) and panitumumab (Vectibix), are anti-EGFR drugs currently used to treat some colorectal cancer patients. Anti-EGFR medications may be used for patients with a RAS wild-type biomarker. Discuss your biomarker status and treatment options with your doctor.

Why do Anti-EGFR drugs affect the skin?

Skin cells have a large number of EGFRs. When anti-EGFR drugs are used to keep cancer cells from growing, they can keep skin, hair, and nail cells from growing as well. This side effect is called skin toxicity. You may also hear it referred to as chemo rash, EGFR rash, and skin rash. About 90% of people treated with cetuximab or panitumumab will experience some form of skin toxicity.
Sun exposure will make your rash feel worse, so avoid it by staying inside during peak hours. When you do go out, always wear a hat and other protective clothing, and apply a mild sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher.

Keep your skin moisturized. Use unscented, mild lotions such as Eucerin, Aveeno, Vanicream, and Cetaphil. Avoid hot showers and bubble baths. Before your shower or bath, apply baby oil or other skin oil to protect your skin from the water.

Drink plenty of fluids to keep your skin hydrated. Use mild, unscented detergents and soaps to wash your clothes.

The Colorectal Cancer Alliance is a national organization committed to ending colorectal cancer within our lifetime. We are your allies — a national network of passionate survivors, caregivers and advocates dedicated to helping you and your family navigate all aspects of the disease, from diagnosis and treatment to a lifetime of progression-free survival. We are a community of people eager to share experiences, address your concerns, and answer your questions. We understand the different stages of the colon cancer journey because we’ve been there. We are here for you when you need us because we believe tomorrow can’t wait.

Other side effects that occur in 30% of people taking these drugs are fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, mouth sores, low magnesium levels, and low red blood count/anemia.

Both men and women should not conceive (get pregnant) while taking these drugs.

Check with your doctor about when you can safely resume breastfeeding if you have taken these drugs.

Call 911 immediately if you experience shortness of breath, fever, wheezing, swelling of the face, feelings of the throat closing up, difficulty in breathing, or hives, as these are possible allergic reactions and need immediate attention.

Never take any medication without discussing it with your care team, including over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and supplements.

There are clinical trials that look at ways to improve quality of life in cancer patients, particularly those experiencing side effects from treatment. Talk to your provider what options are available for you.

www.clinicaltrials.gov