

Cutaneous Lymphoma

Living with Cutaneous Lymphoma

Cutaneous lymphomas are cancers of lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell) that primarily involve the skin. They are sometimes called skin lymphomas, however cutaneous lymphomas are different from skin cancers, which develop from other non-lymphoid cells.

Living with cutaneous lymphoma can have both a physical and emotional impact on people's lives. The following outlines some of the most common effects and ways to help manage and address these concerns.

SKINCARE

Cutaneous lymphomas, along with some of the treatments used, can make the skin dry, itchy and scaly. The discomfort experienced can disrupt sleep, make it difficult to find comfortable clothes to wear, and even prevent participation in activities like work and exercise. Other more serious concerns include the risk of bacterial infections on the skin, or fissures or painful cracks in the skin.

There are several ways to help keep the skin healthy:

- Moisturising can make the skin feel more comfortable. Look for moisturisers that have a higher content of oil, like ointments and creams. Avoid lotions that are mostly water or gels, that contain alcohol, or any moisturiser with perfumes or dyes.
- If experiencing itching, there are home remedies that can provide relief. Using an ice pack in 10-minute intervals, oatmeal baths and wet dressing have all been reported to help relieve itching. There are also medications available, both over the counter and by prescription, that can help.
- Choose soaps and laundry detergents that are moisturising and fragrance-free. Antibacterial and deodorant soaps can be drying, and fabric softeners are often a source of irritation.
- While some sunlight may be beneficial, too much sun can be damaging. Protect yourself from the sun with sunscreen, wide-brimmed hats and long-sleeves when possible.

Thank you to the Cutaneous
Lymphoma Foundation for their
partnership in developing the
CL Patient Information Package.
www.clfoundation.org

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EMOTIONAL IMPACT

The toll of the physical effects of living with cutaneous lymphoma can also have an emotional impact on patients' lives. Changes to one's life might be met with feelings of depression or anger. Also, people may feel lonely or isolated because they are unable to participate in activities as they once did.

Talking about your concerns and feelings with a family member, friend, or someone on your healthcare team can help you find solutions and support. Your local patient group may have support programs. Find out if the organisation offers one-on-one counselling, education or support sessions, or peer-support programs.

INTIMACY

Cutaneous lymphomas have physical effects on the body, such as plaques, lesions and rashes that can be uncomfortable and unpleasant to be touched. The changes to physical appearances can also lead to self-consciousness.

If you are in a relationship, communicating with your partner about intimacy is critical. Working together and discussing when it's alright to be touched and when it's not is helpful. Explain it is not a rejection but a symptom of the disease.

If you are dating, don't feel pressure to discuss your diagnosis before you are ready. When you are ready, having conversations about intimacy has the potential to lead to more openness and a stronger relationship.

FATIGUE

Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is one of the most common side-effects experienced by patients. It is more severe, more distressing, and less likely to be relieved by rest than the tiredness or fatigue of daily life. CRF is a symptom of the cancer itself, as well as a side-effect of therapies to treat it.

Cancer-related fatigue can also make it difficult to participate in life's activities, including work and social engagements, which can have an emotional impact on the person.

If you think you are experiencing CRF, speak to your healthcare team about an assessment and treatment options.

FERTILITY

Cutaneous lymphomas are most often chronic illnesses and treatments last many months or even years. This can have an impact on fertility.

If you are considering planning a family (now or in the future), it is important to speak to your healthcare team about the effect of various therapies on fertility. This includes the ability to become or get someone pregnant, pregnancy and breastfeeding.