

SKIN TOXICITY & Managing Side Effects

Some of the most common side effects among colorectal cancer patients who take Anti-EGFR therapies such as Erbitux (also known as cetuximab) and Vectibix (also known as panitumumab) are dry skin, acne, and rashes. Symptoms can vary from mild to moderate. Taking an active role in managing the health of your skin before, during, and after treatment will help ease difficult side effects.

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.

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.

FOR MORE
HELP:

Colorectal Cancer Alliance Helpline:
877-422-2030

Erbitux Helpline: 800-545-5979

Vectibix Helpline: 888-427-7478



BEFORE TREATMENT

Ask about the latest medications

Talk to your doctor about recommended medication options for treating skin rash including oral antibiotics and topical ointments. Guidelines suggest starting oral antibiotics one day before beginning anti-EGFR treatment.¹ Your doctor will determine the best option to help provide relief from related rash systems.

Find a good dermatologist

Skin toxicity symptoms may begin to show up as early as the first week of treatment. Ask your cancer care team to refer you to a dermatologist who can prescribe a tetracycline class antibiotic that should be taken prior to and throughout treatment. Appropriate skin care can help you stay on your treatment plan longer and with less discomfort.

Learn the signs and symptoms

The majority of people who are treated with EGFR-i drugs will develop an acne-like pimply rash on the face, neck, upper chest, scalp, and back. Your hair and nails may be affected as well. Signs and symptoms of skin toxicity include:

- A tingling, tight, sore sensation on the skin of the face, neck, chest, and scalp
- Dry, scaly, or peeling skin
- Itchy skin
- Deep cracks in the skin
- Acne-like bumps on the face, neck, and chest
- Sore areas inside and around the nose and mouth
- Redness, swelling, or sores around the fingernails and toenails
- Nails that become separated or loosened from the nail bed
- Changes in the texture of hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes

[1] Lacouture ME, Anadkat MJ, Bensadoun RJ, et al. Support Care Cancer. 2011;19(8):1079-1095.

DURING TREATMENT

Prescription Options

Antihistamines, topical or oral, may also help with itching. If the rash is severe, your doctor can prescribe oral corticosteroids, prednisone, or dexamethasone.

Daily Routines

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.

Personal Care

Don't shave your face/legs when the rash is very uncomfortable. Try using an electric razor when you shave since they are less irritating to the skin.

Keep your fingernails and toenails short, clean, and dry. Talk to your care team first if you are considering a manicure or pedicure.

Protect your skin and nails with gloves when washing dishes, gardening, or cleaning.

You may notice that your hair becomes fine, brittle, or curly. The color may also change to a darker or yellowish hue.

Your eyelashes and eyebrows can thin out or they may grow so long they bother your eyes. Trim them carefully if needed.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERBITUX & VECTIBIX

- 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



Made possible with support from



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.