Skin Toxicity

Clinical summary of the ONS Guidelines™ for cancer treatment–related skin toxicity

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Cancer treatment–related skin toxicities are a frequent and distressing side effect of antineoplastic therapies, especially chemotherapy and targeted therapies. Skin toxicities associated with these therapies can include rashes, hand-foot skin reaction, hand-foot syndrome, and hair loss. These symptoms cause not only physical pain and discomfort but also psychological distress, and they can become a stigma of the patient's cancer diagnosis. Skin toxicities can cause treatment delays and even discontinuation, which affects clinical outcome. The prevention of toxicities and effective, early management can reduce the risk for distress and treatment delays.

KEYWORDS
dermatologic adverse events; rash; alopecia; hand-foot skin reaction; taxanes

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THIS DOCUMENT ACTS AS THE CLINICAL SUMMARY component of the ONS Guidelines™ for the management of cancer treatment–related skin toxicity (Williams et al., 2020), developed by a panel of oncology healthcare professionals after rigorous systematic review of high-quality randomized clinical trials. The guideline is designed to establish the evidence-based efficacy of interventions to prevent and manage cancer treatment–related skin toxicities. Sources of evidence have been divided into pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic interventions. The GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation) approach was used to assess the certainty of the evidence and make the recommendations presented in this clinical summary.

Guideline Questions and Target Audience

What is the efficacy of pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic interventions that prevent or minimize skin, hair, and nail reactions associated with cancer treatments? The target audience for this guideline are clinicians who care for individuals treated for cancer, policymakers, and patients and their caregivers.

How the Guideline Was Developed

This guideline was developed by an interprofessional panel of healthcare professionals, a methods expert, and a patient representative. The panel prioritized clinical questions related to the management of cancer treatment–related skin toxicities and outcomes identified as critical for decision making. A systematic review and network meta-analysis of the literature was conducted to inform the clinical questions. The GRADE approach was used to assess the certainty of the evidence and provide a foundation for recommendations (Guyatt et al., 2011).

Why the Guideline Matters

Skin toxicities and changes associated with treatment are some of the most distressing adverse events for patients with cancer. They are a physical sign of the disease and can cause emotional turmoil (Salzmann et al., 2019). Skin changes not only are associated with psychologic distress, but they also induce pain and pruritus, and can contribute to infection that warrants treatment delays and discontinuation. However, prevention of toxicities and appropriate management can improve the treatment experience for patients with cancer. The guideline provides recommendations for clinicians to prevent or minimize skin toxicities in patients undergoing cancer treatment.

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