

Information for
patients & families

Caring for your barrier film during radiation therapy



Symptom Management - Skin



Cancer Care
Alberta

Contact Information

My contact number(s):

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Introduction

Your doctor may recommend using a barrier film (like Mepitel®) to help prevent radiation side effects to your skin during and after radiation treatment.

This booklet will help you understand how to apply, remove, replace, and care for barrier film at home. Following these instructions can help keep your skin healthy and make your radiation treatment more comfortable.

Barrier films don't work for every kind of cancer. Before you buy or use one, ask your healthcare team if it's the right choice for you.



What is a barrier film?

A barrier film is a thin, clear, soft sheet made with silicone, that you place on your skin in the areas getting radiation treatment. It sticks gently to your skin to act like a protective barrier. The film is breathable and flexible, so it moves with your skin and stays comfortable during treatment. It does not affect your radiation treatment.

There are different types of barrier films. Make sure you are using the type recommended by your healthcare team.

Why are barrier films used?

A barrier film is used to protect your skin during radiation treatment. It makes a thin layer on your skin to stop your clothes from rubbing and helps keep your skin moist. This can help stop your skin from getting sore or red.

Barrier films can:

- Reduce redness and irritation.
- Help stop peeling or sores.
- Keep your skin more comfortable.
- Protect your skin so your treatment can continue.

It's important that you use the right barrier film recommended by your healthcare team. Not all dressings or films will protect your skin during radiation treatment. Using the wrong product might not help and could even cause skin problems.

When NOT to use a barrier film

Do not use a barrier film:

- If you are allergic to any of the ingredients.
- On open cuts or broken skin.
- If your healthcare team tells you not to.
- If your skin is blistered, or infected.

The cancer centre does not cover the cost of barrier films. Some private insurance plans may cover the cost.

Talk with your healthcare team for more information about the cost and what options might be available to you.

How is a barrier film put on?

Before your radiation treatment begins, a member of your healthcare team will place the first barrier film on your skin. This ensures it is applied correctly in the treatment area and protects your skin during treatment.

Do not put creams, powders, or deodorants on your skin on the day your film is applied.

If you are having breast radiation, make sure your armpit on the side being treated is shaved.

How is the film put on?

- You will lie down in the same position as your radiation treatment.
- The healthcare team will check that your skin is clean and dry.
- The film will be applied to the area getting radiation treatment.

Using barrier films during breast cancer treatment

Every patient is different, and radiation treatment is planned just for them. Some people get radiation only to the breast. Others also need treatment to an area near the neck. When this happens, the neck or back might also need a special barrier film to protect the skin. Your healthcare team will apply the barrier film where you need it.

Caring for your barrier film

Clothing

- Wear loose, soft clothes to avoid rubbing.

Bathing/ showering

- The barrier film is waterproof and you may shower. When showering, face away from the water. Use a hand towel to cover the barrier film. Try to avoid direct water spray to the area.
- Do not soak in baths, use hot tubs, or swim.
- Pat the film gently to dry. Avoid rubbing the area with your hands or towels.

Lotions/ creams

- Do not use creams, powders, or deodorants near the film unless your healthcare team says it is okay. Creams can cause the barrier film to lift off your skin.

Shaving

- Do not shave over or near the film

Heat/cold

- Do not use heating pads, hot packs, or ice packs on top of the film.
- Keep the skin being treated with radiation covered from the sun, wind, and cold.

Exercise/
sweat

- Sweating a lot from exercise can make the film peel or lift off.
- Try to avoid sweating too much while wearing the film.

Do not
scratch or
peel

- Leave the film in place, even if the edges start to lift or peel on their own.

Peeling/
lifting

- If the edges begin to peel, press the film gently to re-stick. If that doesn't work, carefully trim the edges with scissors.
- If needed, you can cut a new piece of film and place it over the trimmed edge. Overlap each piece by about 1 cm.

When to replace your barrier film

The barrier film can stay on your skin as long as it is not damaged and feels okay. Always follow the advice from your healthcare team, and check your skin often.

Replace your barrier film when:

- Your healthcare team tells you to.
- The film comes off or starts lifting.
- The edges are peeling a lot.
- The film gets dirty.
- The film feels uncomfortable.

How to remove your barrier film

1. Stand under a warm (not hot) shower to soak the film.
2. Slowly peel the film back, keeping it close to your skin as you pull.
3. Once the film is off, gently wash the area with mild soap and pat it dry.
4. Check your skin. If it looks sore, red, or wet, talk to your healthcare team before putting on a new film (you can bring your barrier film to your next radiation treatment appointment).

Do not pull it off quickly or pull hard. If the film feels stuck, keep soaking it until it comes off more easily.

Replacing the barrier film at home

You will need help from a family member, friend, or caregiver to replace the barrier film, especially in areas that are hard to reach.

Ask someone you trust to help you, and follow the step-by-step instructions your healthcare team showed you. If you do not have anyone to help, tell your healthcare team.

If you replace the film, tell your healthcare team at your next visit so they can check it for you.

Prepare your workspace

1. Clean your work area with liquid soap and water or disinfecting wipes.
2. Clean your hands using soap or hand sanitizer.

Soap and water:

Wash your hands with soap and water for 1 minute and dry your hands with a clean towel.

Soap and water are best to use:

- When your hands are dirty.
- After you use the bathroom.



Alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

The sanitizer should have 60% to 95% alcohol in it to work best. Rub your hands together for at least 15 seconds. Let them dry completely.

Hand sanitizer is best to use when:

- Your hands do not look or feel dirty.
- Water and soap are not available.



Gather supplies

You will need:

- Barrier film
- Clean scissors

Apply the new film

Get ready

- Lie down in the same position you use for your radiation treatments.
- You will start at the top of the treatment area and work your way down.
- Begin on the outside of the body (side) and move toward the middle of the body.
- You will put the barrier film in the same area where your healthcare team put the first one. If you are unsure, ask your healthcare team.

Step 1: First sheet

- Peel off half of the paper on the back of the film.
- Place the top edge of the film at the top of the treatment area.
- Gently let the film fall down onto the skin. **Do not pull or stretch the film.**
- Peel off the rest of the paper on the back.
- Press the film smoothly onto the skin.
- Take off the paper frame around the outside of the film.
- Gently press out any air bubbles.

Make sure each piece overlaps the one before by about 1 cm to fully protect your skin.

Step 2: Second sheet

- You can use a whole new sheet or cut the next sheet in half lengthwise to make two thinner strips.

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- When you place the new sheet, overlap it with the edge of the piece already on your skin by about 1 cm.
 - Gently press the new piece onto your skin, smoothing it down without pulling or stretching.
 - Gently press out any air bubbles.

Step 3: Add more sheets

- Continue to add more sheets of film as needed using the same method as before.

Step 4: Check the film

- Look over all areas to make sure they are covered.
- Gently press out any small air bubbles.

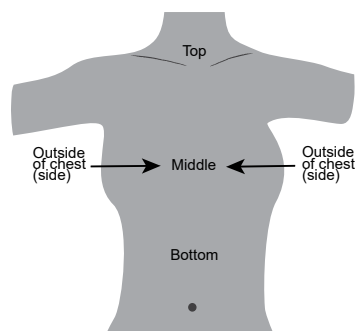
Tips for breast cancer patients

Applying a barrier film to the breast area can be tricky because of the curves and movement. See page 10 for step-by-step instructions on how to replace the film. When replacing the film over the breast area:

- Lie down in the same position you use for your radiation treatments, with your arm raised above your head.
- Begin on the outside of your chest near the armpit, then move toward the breastbone (middle of your chest).
- Start applying the film at the top of your chest and work your way down.
- The exact area for the film depends on your treatment. Some patients need the film near their neck, and others may need it on their back too.
- Replace the barrier film in the same area your healthcare team placed the film. If you are unsure, ask your healthcare team. It is better to apply too much film, than not enough.

Placing the film over the breast

- Place the film on the top of the breast and work down. Gently tuck the film under the breast. Only lift the breast gently as needed, to avoid stretching the film. Apply the film under the breast continuing onto the upper belly.
- Overlap each piece by about 1 cm and press out any air bubbles.
- The bottom of the film should go at least 3 cm past the bottom of the breast.
- Ensure the breast area and crease are covered without any gaps.



Start on the outside of your chest and move toward the middle.
Apply the film working from top to bottom.

Do not stretch the film. This can apply pressure to the skin, and may change the shape of the breast making it feel uncomfortable. Tell your healthcare team if the barrier film feels uncomfortable or if your breast looks or feels different.

After mastectomy (if this applies to you)

- Place the film from your collarbone down to just below where the breast was, ending on the upper belly.
- Overlap each piece by about 1 cm and press out any air bubbles.

What to do if the barrier film will not stick

Make sure your skin is clean and dry.

- Wash the area gently with mild soap and water, then pat it dry.
- Do not use any lotion, cream, powder, or deodorant before putting on the film.

To help it stick better, warm the film by holding it flat between your hands for about 20 seconds before taking off the back of the film.

Carefully remove the back of the film and press the film gently but firmly onto your skin, smoothing it out as you go.

If it doesn't stick, try using a new piece of film. If it still won't stay in place, let your healthcare team know.

When to call your healthcare team

You should call your healthcare team if:

- You cannot get the new film to stay in place.
- Your skin under or around the film gets red, blistered, wet, or painful.
- You feel more itching, burning, or swelling.
- You notice signs of infection, like pus, spreading redness, warmth, fever, or chills.

In some cases, the barrier film can cause an allergic reaction.

If you notice itchiness and/or redness within 24 hours of application, please contact the healthcare team.

After treatment

It is very important to keep wearing the barrier film for at least 14 days after your radiation treatment ends.

During this time, take care of the film the same way you did during treatment. Your skin might not react right away after radiation. It can take a few days for signs of irritation to show up. Usually, the skin feels worst about 7 to 10 days after your last treatment. Keeping the barrier film on during this time helps protect your skin.

Removing the film safely

- Be very careful when you take the film off to protect your skin.
- See page 8 for step-by-step instructions on how to remove the film safely.

After the film is removed

- Once the film is off, gently put lotion on the area at least twice a day.
- Use a mild, unscented lotion that is gentle on your skin. Some examples are Cetaphil®, Glaxol®, Cerave®, and Lubriderm®.
- If your doctor has prescribed a cream, use it exactly as they told you.
- Avoid anything that can rub or irritate your skin, like tight clothes, strong soaps, scratching or scrubbing the area.

Protecting your skin

- Wear loose, soft clothes to avoid rubbing your skin.
- Keep the treated area out of the sun. If you go outside, cover the area with clothes.
- The skin where you had treatment will always be more sensitive to sunlight, even after it heals. To protect it, always use sunscreen and try to keep it covered when you're outside.

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The information is to be updated every 3 years, or as new clinical evidence emerges. If there are any concerns or updates with this information, please email cancer.patiented@cancercarealberta.ca.

Important things to remember:



Keep the film on if it is intact and comfortable



Do not use creams, powders, or deodorant on the area



Call your healthcare team if your skin is very sore, blistered or infected

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cancercarealberta.ca