



Photosensitivity and Sun Safety

for Your Skin During
Treatment with
Targeted Therapy



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Photosensitivity

Skin conditions like rash, itching and dryness are common side effects of cancer treatments. However, the targeted immune therapies vemurafenib (Zelboraf) and cobimetinib (Cotellic) have the additional side effect of causing your skin to be highly photosensitive. This means your skin will likely have an abnormal sensitivity to ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun or other artificial sources (such as tanning beds or UV lights). This may result in accelerated burning and painful blistering of the skin. Photosensitivity and rash usually occur within days of starting treatment. They continue as long as you are on these drug combinations and for a period of time after therapy, while the drugs leave your system.

Sun Safety Precautions

Most of us know that sun safety should be part of our everyday routine for healthy living. As a patient taking targeted therapy, sun safety has to become a priority during treatment. You must avoid sun exposure, no matter what time of year. Did you know that the reflection of the sun off snow and ice in winter can be eight to ten times stronger than off of water or wet beach sand in summer? Or that UV rays can penetrate the windows in our homes and cars? To help protect yourself fully, here are some year-round sun safety precautions:

Wear protective clothing covering as much of your skin as possible, and a broad-brimmed hat with at least a 2-inch brim to shade the nose and ears. Tightly-woven fabrics work best. When you hold the fabric up to a bright light, you shouldn't see any light coming through.

When outdoors, use a broad spectrum, water-resistant UVA/UVB sunscreen and lip balm (minimum SPF of 50) during your entire period of treatment and for some time after treatment ends. Apply the sunscreen in two even coats and reapply every few hours or sooner if sweating heavily. UVA rays from the sun will penetrate through the car glass, even with tinted windows, so you will still require sunscreen on exposed skin while in a car.

Wear protective eye wear such as wraparound sunglasses with 100% UV protective lenses to protect your eyes from damage.

Seek shade whenever possible, but most particularly when the UV index is above 3 and between peak hours of 11 am to 3 pm.

Your health care team is an important source of information on how to care for your skin during treatment. Should you develop a sunburn, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends the following:

- **Put a cold, damp towel on your skin.** Do this for 10 or 15 minutes a few times every day. This will help take some of the heat out of your skin. You also can take frequent cool baths or showers to help relieve the pain. As soon as you get out of the bathtub or shower, gently pat yourself dry, but leave a little water on your skin. Then apply a moisturizer to help trap the water in your skin. This will help ease the dryness.

- **Use a moisturizer that contains aloe vera or soy to help soothe sunburned skin.** Lotions that have these ingredients in them, may help your skin feel better. Be careful not to use lotions or creams that have any of the following listed in the ingredients: petroleum, benzocaine, or lidocaine. Products with petroleum trap the heat in your skin (and you don't want that!), while benzocaine and lidocaine can bother and/or irritate your skin. If a particular area feels especially uncomfortable, you may want to apply a hydrocortisone cream that you can buy without a prescription.
- **Ask your oncologist or health care team about taking ibuprofen.** If the sunburn really hurts, this will help reduce any swelling, redness and discomfort.
- **Drink extra water.** When you have a sunburn, your body can lose more water than usual, which can lead to dehydration. Drinking extra water when you are sunburned helps prevent dehydration.
- **Leave blisters alone.** If your skin blisters, this means you have a second-degree sunburn. Avoid popping the blisters so that the delicate skin below can heal while being protected from infection.
- **Tell your caregiver if you feel sick.** You might need to see your doctor if you feel dizzy, weak, sick to your stomach, cold, or just not yourself. These things can mean the sunburn is making you really sick and you need help.
- **Take extra care to protect sunburned skin while it heals.** Wear clothing that covers your skin when outdoors. Tightly-woven fabrics work best. When you hold the fabric up to a bright light, you shouldn't see any light coming through.

American Academy of Dermatology [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2018 August].
Available from: <https://www.aad.org/public/kids/skin/skin-cancer/treating-sunburn>



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