



SKIN AND HAIR PROBLEMS

Effects of Dialysis

Dialysis can have an effect on skin and hair for some people. Changes to the skin are particularly common. If this is something you're experiencing, this fact sheet will offer some solutions and give you some questions to ask your doctor.

Skin Problems

Your skin may seem more fragile when you're on dialysis. It may bruise or even tear easily. Dry, itchy or cracking skin is common. Some skin problems are minor, but others can make you feel self-conscious. It's important to remember that many skin problems can be helped or improved.

Bruising

There are many reasons why you may find that you're bruising easily. They can be related to your dialysis or caused by other health problems. Here are some of the reasons that may apply to you:

- You're taking an aspirin or other blood thinners such as warfarin, clopidogrel or ticagrelor.
- You're taking other medications that can increase bruising, such as prednisone.
- The level of platelets, or blood clotting cells, in your blood is low.
- Other factors, such as increasing age and other medical conditions and treatments can make the small blood vessels of the skin more fragile.

Itching

Itching also has many causes. It may be caused by high blood levels of phosphorus. Controlling your phosphate levels by watching your diet and taking your phosphate binders with food can help.

Other causes of itching include not enough dialysis and dry skin. Long, hot baths that strip the oils from your skin and alcohol-based products may also cause itching by drying your skin out.

If you only itch when you're on dialysis, an allergy or other reaction may be the reason. This could be caused by any number of things, including the blood thinner or dialyzer being used during your treatment, or the detergents used to clean chairs or towels. If you experience itching during dialysis, alert your dialysis team.

Hair problems

Hair is made of protein. If you become malnourished, after a few months your hair may break more easily and fall out. Eating enough protein will help, but it will take a couple of months to see a change. Ask your dietitian about good sources of protein.

Hair loss can also be caused by zinc deficiency, thyroid problems, reactions to medications, and other problems. Some patients have had hair loss when the dialysis unit changes the type of dialyzer used. Talk with your doctor about this, or ask for a referral to a skin doctor.

Hair loss may also be related to the natural aging process.

What you can do

- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about your platelet count or warfarin level (called INR) if you are on warfarin.
- Try to figure out what may be causing your itching. Is it better at some times than others? What helps or makes it worse? Does your skin look normal, or is it different?
- Try a few over-the-counter lotions to see if one works for you. Some patients find that coconut oil is soothing. Ask your doctor about lotions that might help.
- Remember, if your skin is itchy, always rub, don't scratch.
- If your skin is cracked or blistered and you're feeling self-conscious, talk to your doctor as soon as possible. Ask for a referral to a skin doctor.
- Ask your doctor if there may be other medical issues that might be contributing to your symptoms (such as thyroid, etc.).
- Treat your hair gently. Avoid harsh perms or colours, and don't use tight rubber bands.
- Ask a stylist for tips to hide thinning hair.
- Be sure to eat the right amount of protein. Talk to your dietitian

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