Use of Hydrogel for Radiotherapy Patients

Hydrogel dressings are a special type of wound dressing. They can be used on skin that is red, tender, sore, or weepy. These dressings can sometimes relieve pain. They do so by covering exposed nerve endings. They also keep wounds moist. Moist wounds heal more quickly than dry wounds.

Hydrogel dressings are made up of a clear, gel-like substance with a plastic film layer. Apply to clean skin with clean hands. Pat skin dry with a soft cotton towel. Skin creams are sometimes used with these dressings. Check with your nurse if you are using skin creams.

To apply a hydrogel dressing, peel back the plastic layer. This will expose the moist, jelly-like substance. The gel side of the dressing is put on the skin.

Keeping hydrogel dressings in place can be tricky. **These dressings should not be held in place with tape.** Putting tape on treated skin can cause further damage. The nurses will help you.

Hydrogel dressings work best on flat areas of the body that do not move much. They can remain in place for several hours, even overnight. Sometimes the skin under these dressings can weep or drain fluids. If this happens, cotton or gauze dressings can be put on top. Most drainage will be milky colored or blood tinged. If drainage is green or yellow, it may be a sign of infection. Other signs of infection include increased redness around the wound site, pain at the wound site, and/or fever. Report any signs of infection to the nurse or doctor.

Hydrogel dressings do not work very well in skin folds or areas that move. In these cases, other types of dressings can be used, but other types of dressings may be more helpful. The nurses will help you with this.

Your skin needs to be clean and dry before your radiation treatment. Do not apply any creams on your skin at least two hours before your treatment time. Hydrogel dressings can go on after your treatment. The nurses can help you with this.

If you have any questions about your skin, please call the clinic between the hours of 8:00 and 5:00 pm. Ask to speak to a nurse. The phone numbers are shown below:

**UW Hospital Radiation Oncology Clinic:**
608-263-8500
East Clinic Radiation Oncology:
608-265-4357

After 5pm and on weekends, your phone call will go to the paging operator. Ask for the Radiation-therapy doctor on call. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, please call 1-800-323-8942.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©2016, University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6285.