Hand-Foot Syndrome

What is hand-foot syndrome?
Hand-foot syndrome (or palmer-plantar erythrodysesthesias) is a common side effect of certain chemotherapy and other medicines. It can cause redness, swelling, and pain to the palms of your hands and soles of your feet. In severe cases of hand-foot syndrome, blisters may also form and the skin on your hands and feet may crack. It may become difficult for you to walk or grasp objects.

Tell your doctor if you start to develop any of these symptoms on the palms of your hands or soles of your feet:
- Redness
- Swelling
- Pain
- Tingling or burning sensation
- Blisters
- Cracked, flaking skin

How can I prevent hand-foot syndrome from developing?
There are things you can do to prevent hand-foot syndrome from developing. These include avoiding sources of heat and friction to the palms of your hands and soles of your feet. These include:
- Exposure to hot water when bathing or doing dishes.
- Other sources of heat, such as saunas or sun exposure.
- Activities that cause rubbing on your palms and soles, such as running or tennis.
- Using tools that you have to grasp and cause friction, such as pliers or screwdrivers.
- Exposure to harsh chemicals.

Applying creams that are free of fragrance, dyes, and alcohol to your hands and feet can also help prevent hand-foot syndrome from developing. Ask your healthcare team for specific suggestions.

What do I do if I develop hand-foot syndrome?
Unfortunately, hand-foot syndrome may still develop despite trying to prevent it. If you develop hand-foot syndrome, your doctor might decrease or stop the dose of your chemotherapy to allow your symptoms to resolve. While the symptoms resolve, there are things you can do to reduce any pain or discomfort.
- Pain relievers, such as non-steroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can reduce the discomfort and swelling in your hands and feet.
- Increase application of creams to your hands and feet.
- Continue to avoid sources of heat and friction.
- Your doctor may prescribe additional medications if needed to manage your symptoms.
References
