

Palliative Pain and Symptom Management Consultation Program Northeastern Ontario

Skin Changes in Progressive Illness and at End-of-Life

THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A CAREGIVER OR LOVED ONE

- With hygiene care and bathing pat skin dry (do not rub).
- Being proactive and applying non-scented moisturizers can help prevent skin breakdown
- When repositioning loved ones you should handle them gently and slowly.
- Repositioning on a consistent basis can help promote comfort and skin integrity (example reposition every 2 hours is a rule of thumb).

BELOW-A PICTURE OF MOTTLING - SEE SKIN CHANGES AT END-OF-LIFE



GENERAL SKIN CHANGES

- Dryness can occur as physical health continues to decline and when someone is approaching end-of-life.
- Dry skin is typically caused by
 - a decrease in fluid intake (this is normal in advanced disease and at end of life- see [FOOD FOR THOUGHT FLYER on PPSMCneo website for more details related to nutrition changes](#))
 - decreased oil production by glands
 - increased fluid losses
- As the skin loses its moisture, it can also become thinner which can lead to easier bruising and skin tears
- Some additional skin changes you may see:
 - Swelling (edema)
 - Yellowing of eyes and skin (jaundice)
 - Flushing (redness as a result of fever or other circulatory changes)
- If you see these changes, please speak to your healthcare provider.

SKIN CHANGES AT END-OF-LIFE

- At the end-of-life families can expect to see skin changes. You may notice blotchy, red or purplish discoloration to the skin.
- This particular skin change is called mottling. Mottling happens when the heart can no longer pump blood effectively to the extremities: hands, arms, legs and feet. Mottling is often seen in the last days or hours of life; however, there is no exact timeline. For instance, mottling can happen weeks before end-of-life. When you think you see mottling notify a member of your care team.
- This process does not cause any pain to the patient. The patient may feel cold to touch. You can apply blankets for warmth if you feel this is useful, **this will likely not change** the color of their skin or how cool they feel to your touch