

# Radiation to the Breast/Chest Wall

## What you need to know

As it works to rid your body of cancer cells, radiation therapy can cause side effects to the skin in the treated area of the breast/chest wall.

Most side effects begin after two or three weeks of treatment. Report any side effects you experience to your radiation oncology team.

This card provides information about how to minimize and treat side effects.

## Skin reaction

Skin reaction is a common side effect of radiation to the breast/chest wall. Initially, this reaction may appear as pinkness or tanning. It may progress to red, hot or open moist peeling areas of skin. Your skin may feel dry or itchy, or you may notice an itchy, bumpy rash in the treated area.

### Here's how to care for your skin in the treated area:

- Use non-deodorant, non-perfumed soap such as unscented Dove or Basis. Gently cleanse (don't scrub) the treatment area and pat dry. Don't rub the markings on your skin.
- If you must shave your underarm, use an electric razor. Don't use a blade razor.
- Use aluminum-free deodorant such as Tom's of Maine, Arm & Hammer Essentials or Nature's Gate Organics. Don't apply deodorant within four hours before your treatment. If the skin in your underarm area becomes red or tender, stop using deodorant until your skin has healed.
- Don't apply heat or ice packs/pads directly to skin in the treated area.
- Don't wear underwire bras. If your skin is irritated, wear a soft cotton bra, camisole or no bra.
- You'll be sensitive to sunburn in the treated area so wear clothing that covers it and don't expose that skin to sun. After you've completed treatment and your skin has healed, you may expose it to sun but use a sunblock of SPF 30 or higher and reapply it frequently.
- Initially, apply the cream recommended by your radiation nurse or physician to your skin in the treatment area once a day. If your skin becomes dry or irritated, you may use the cream two to four times per day.
  - Don't apply it to the markings.
  - Use it inside the marked area.
  - Don't apply within four hours before your treatment.
- If you develop an itchy, bumpy rash in the upper, inner portion of the breast/chest wall that isn't relieved with the recommended cream, try using over-the-counter 1%

hydrocortisone cream twice a day.

- Report any open skin areas to your nurse or radiation therapist.

## Fatigue

During the last few weeks of your treatment, you may experience some generalized fatigue. You may need additional rest. Try these strategies to fight fatigue:

- Balance activity with rest. If you feel tired, take a brief nap, if possible, or put your feet up briefly, then resume your activity.
- Drink six to eight, eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated beverages each day.
- Stay active. Walking is a non-stressful activity that may help fatigue.

## Nutrition

Good nutrition is important. Try to eat three balanced meals each day. Don't try to diet or lose weight during treatment and don't skip meals. If you lose weight, a nurse will discuss your diet with you. If you need guidance about what makes a balanced meal, please discuss this with a nurse.

You may take a multivitamin but do not take vitamin E or vitamin C tablets.

**Important Note:** While you're undergoing radiation therapy, pregnancy is not advised. If you're not sure if you're pregnant or think you might be, please report this to your radiation therapy physician immediately.

## Questions? Ask Us.

**Remember: Report any side effects to the Radiation Oncology staff.**

If you have concerns or questions, please ask them during your treatment appointment. If you need to speak with someone urgently, please call:

- Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Radiation Oncology Center at 314-251-6844
- After hours, to reach a physician call 314-663-3011



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