

CHEM Center for Radiation Therapy

Side Effects and Skin Care during Treatment

The side effects of your therapy have been explained to you by your radiation oncologist. Be certain to discuss the side effects at any time with your Doctor or Nurse.

Listed below are the more common side effects of radiation treatments to your breast.

These side effects do not occur immediately but will become more visible as your treatments progress.

Common side effects

- The skin in the area being treated will become reddened, dry and itchy .
- You may experience minor swelling, a feeling of heaviness or tenderness in the treated breast.
- “Pinching” or mild “jabbing” sensations in the treated breast.

As your treatments progress you may experience a mild fatigue. Plan your activities according to the way you feel. Rest if you are tired.

Exercises

Following surgery you may have been instructed to perform exercises to regain full range of motion of your arm. These exercises should continue during your radiation therapy and for 6-12 months following completion of your treatments.

Lab work

Periodically during your treatments we will be monitoring your blood counts. Please inform us if you are having blood tests for another doctor so that we may coordinate our requests.

Skin Care During Treatment

During your treatments you may shower or bathe as you normally would. Remember to be gentle with the skin in the area being treated. Cleanse with warm water. Mild soap may be used.

- **Do not** apply any moisturizers, creams or lotions without first discussing with your nurse.
- **Do not** use deodorant on the side being treated. A dusting of cornstarch or baking soda is a good alternative to the use of deodorant during therapy.
- **Do not** shave under the arm being treated. Ask the nurse about the use of an electric razor.
- **Avoid extremes** in temperature.
- **Do not** apply **cold** compresses to the skin. **Avoid hot** showers or baths.
- **Do not** use tape on skin within treated area.
- **Avoid direct** sun exposure to treated skin.

Wear loose fitting clothing, preferably cotton next to your skin. Bras should not fit tightly. It may be necessary to purchase a larger size bra for your comfort.

If you wear a prosthesis, please ask if you should continue during your therapy.

Special attention should be given to the folds of skin under the breast and under the arms. A light dusting of corn starch will help to reduce friction in these areas. **Stop** cornstarch if open, wet areas develop and bring to the attention of your physician or nurse.

Moisturizers may be applied to dry, itchy skin. Use only moisturizers recommended or supplied by the CHEM Center.

End of Treatment Instructions

Skin care

You should continue to be gentle with your skin in the weeks following completion of your treatments. Gradually the redness will begin to fade and any discomfort you have experienced lessen.

Continue to moisturize at least once a day with a moisturizer recommended by your physician or nurse.

Report increased tenderness, redness or the development of open, moist areas to your CHEM physician.

Avoid sun exposure to the treated area. If exposure to sun is unavoidable, sunscreen (>15 SPF) is recommended.

If you have had surgery to the lymph nodes under your arm, you should not allow the drawing of blood, insertion of IV's or the taking of blood pressure from the arm of the side which was treated.

Gloves should be worn when gardening or during any activity which may result in minor scratches or burns. Should accidental injury occur, the area should be cleansed. Report any signs of infection (redness, swelling, heat) to your physician.

Fatigue

Fatigue may continue for several weeks following completion of your therapy. Plan your activities according to the way you feel. Rest if you are tired.

Diet

It is important to eat well-balanced meals even though your treatments are completed. Good nutrition helps speed the healing process.

Exercise

If you have had an axillary node dissection, continue gentle range of motion exercises. You should have full range of motion to the affected arm.

Follow-up appointments

Routine follow-up appointments with your radiation oncologists will be scheduled. Your first appointment will be one month after your last treatment.

Now is also the time to notify other physicians involved in your care of the completion of your radiation.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding your recovery, do not hesitate to call us at 781 279-0655.