

Moving oncology care forward so that you can look forward to life's moments

*Advice for patients
receiving radiation to
the breast and
chest wall*



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Some people receiving radiation treatment may experience a skin reaction in the area being treated. Skin reactions vary from none to a sunburn-like reaction where the skin can become reddened, dry and sometimes itchy. In severe cases, blistering may occur. Not everyone will experience a skin reaction as it depends on the area being treated, the dose of radiation, the type of radiation and the number of treatments being given. For most people, if a skin reaction is going to occur, it is not usually

until after the second week of treatment. It reaches its peak about two weeks after treatment is completed. The reaction may take up to six weeks after treatment to completely resolve.

The radiotherapists administering treatment on the machines will keep a close eye on the condition of your skin during your treatment and can further advise you if a reaction appears. There are several things you can do to minimise skin reactions:

/ What to do

- Shower as normal using warm rather than hot water. Allow the water to gently run over the area being treated. Avoid prolonged soaking in the bath or swimming as this may increase any reaction that occurs.
- Use mild soap e.g. Dove or baby soap when washing but use sparingly in the area being treated.
- Do not rub the treated area. Friction aggravates the skin reaction. Dry it carefully by patting the area with a soft towel.
- Do not be concerned if the pen marks on your skin rub or wash off. Do not deliberately remove them.
- Avoid using deodorant under the arm on the treated side. Deodorant of any description should not be applied to broken skin as this may cause complications with infection.
- Avoid shaving, waxing or using hair removal cream under the arm on the treated side.
- Do not apply any moisturisers / creams to the area unless your oncologist has recommended it. Moisturisers of any description should not be applied to broken skin as this may cause complications with infection.
- Do not apply cosmetics, perfumes or sunscreen to the area being treated whilst on treatment. They may increase skin reactions.
- You may use baby powder on the area being treated, preferably an antiseptic powder.
- Avoid exposing the treated area to excessive heat or cold e.g. hot water bottles, ice packs, heat bags or electric blankets.
- If your skin becomes itchy, try not to scratch as this may increase the reaction. Tell a radiotherapist or your oncologist, they can advise on or prescribe creams to relieve this.



- If you experience a severe reaction where the skin may begin to blister, the oncology nurses will use special dressings to soothe, protect and allow your skin to heal.
- If you experience pain due to your skin reaction, particularly pain that wakes you at night, please discuss this with a radiotherapist or your radiation oncologist. There are pain medications available to relieve reaction symptoms.
- Cotton bras without an underwire or a soft sports-type bra tend to be less irritating to the skin. Where circumstances allow, it is preferable to go without a bra and wear a light cotton shirt.
- Avoid exposing the treated area to direct sunlight. Cover up with a loose material scarf or clothing or stay in the shade. Even when you have finished your treatment, you must take care of the skin in the treated area, as it will always be more sensitive to the sun.
- If you are taking any vitamin supplements, please discuss this with your oncologist to find out which supplements you can continue taking during treatment.
- It is common for patients receiving radiation to feel more tired than usual. This is a normal side-effect of the radiation treatment.
- Your oncologist will see you up to once a week whilst you are on treatment. They may advise on, or prescribe creams and medications to help relieve the symptoms.
- Do not hesitate to ask a radiotherapist or your oncologist if you have any questions or are experiencing any problems.
- Please inform your oncologist if you are taking any other treatments as these may reduce the effectiveness of your radiotherapy treatment or aggravate any side-effects.

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