

PATIENT INFORMATION

After Breast or Chest Wall Radiotherapy

This leaflet provides you with information on post treatment side effects, now that you have completed radiotherapy to the breast / chest wall.

You might not see any visible skin reaction whilst you are having your treatment, but you may notice your skin reaction developing around 10 days or up to several weeks after your treatment has finished, depending on the length of your treatment course.

You may notice:

Your skin gradually becoming pinker or darker, depending on your skin colour. The skin may feel warm to the touch. This is called erythema.

Your skin may feel dry or tight rather like a “sun reaction”.

A rash may also appear and feel itchy and sore. This is called dry desquamation.

Very rarely, the skin may peel and can be very sore. It may also produce fluid. This is called moist desquamation and can be very uncomfortable and distressing. This can happen where there are skin folds, or where the skin receives a high dose of radiotherapy.

If this happens, we recommend Flaminel ®products, Flaminel ®Hydro if only slightly weeping, or Flaminel ® Forte if more heavily leaking fluid and exudate. Please contact the Radiotherapy Aftercare line for how to obtain supplies.

Please continue to follow the skin care advice you have been given by the radiotherapy team until your skin returns to normal. Once your skin has fully healed, you can use normal skin care products again. Most patients find their skin has healed by about 4 weeks after treatment finishes. If the skin has peeled, healing may take longer than this.

Regular use of a Sodium Lauryl Sulphate (SLS) -free moisturiser can help maintain and improve your skin condition, so we recommend continuing this long term.

You may experience discomfort, shooting or dull pain, or breast tenderness. Discomfort around the scar is common and may be relieved with paracetamol or ibuprofen, taken according to the packet instructions. If the pain continues, or you feel unwell or concerned, contact the radiotherapy review team.

If your skin is very itchy, you may be advised to apply hydrocortisone cream sparingly. Do not use it on broken skin.

A fan or hairdryer on a cool setting may help relieve itching. Allowing air to reach the skin and not wearing a bra until the reaction settles may also help.

If you can usually take antihistamines, they may help. Follow the instructions on the packet.

Avoid tight sleeves, jewellery or watches on the affected arm. Wear a supportive, well-fitting bra that does not mark the skin, preferably with seamless cups, wide straps and no underwires.

Feeling tired after radiotherapy is normal and may begin sooner if you have also had chemotherapy. The level of tiredness and how long it lasts vary from person to person. Listen to your body, rest when needed and try to maintain your usual sleep routine.

Exercise can help reduce the risk of lymphoedema (swelling in body tissues) by encouraging lymphatic drainage and preventing swelling. Use your arm and shoulder as normally as possible and exercise regularly but avoid overexertion.

If your arm aches, rest. Avoid activities that place heavy strain on it, such as lifting heavy weights, moving furniture or strenuous gardening. Continue the exercises you were given after surgery.

Swimming, walking and gym-based exercise may help reduce the risk of lymphoedema and support your overall wellbeing. Increase your activity gradually.

Emotional Wellbeing

Cancer diagnosis and treatment can be stressful and tiring. Most people recover soon after treatment and return to normal or near-normal activities, although recovery can take longer than expected. Give yourself time to recover physically and emotionally. You may experience anxiety, worry, impatience, low mood or irritability. These feelings are normal and usually improve with time. If they become difficult to manage, contact The Lodge, cancer Support and Information centre, your GP or Talk Works on 0300 555 3344 for advice and support.

Try to make healthy lifestyle choices to promote your long-term health and well-being, and keep avoiding risk factors such as smoking, excess alcohol consumption and over exposure to the sun.

A healthy balanced and varied diet including 5 portions of fresh fruit or vegetables, dairy or dairy alternatives, beans, pulses, meat, fish or eggs for protein is recommended. It is also important to achieve a good level of activity as recommended by NHS guidelines: www.nhs.uk www.nhs.uk/live-well

Contact details

Radiotherapy Aftercare Line

Phone: 01803 654273

Hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Other useful phone numbers/websites

The Lodge Cancer Support and Information Centre: 01803 656490

Macmillan: 0800 808 00 00 or visit www.macmillan.org.uk

Breast Care Unit: 01803 655662

Breast Cancer Now Charity: 0808 800 6000

Radiotherapy Late Effects Service: 01803 655380

<https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/oncology/radiotherapy-late-effects-service>

<https://www.breastcancernow.org/about-breast-cancer/life-after-treatment/your-body-after-breast-cancer-treatment/>

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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