

This instruction is intended for our patients who are in a care relationship.

Satakunta Hospital District | Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia | Hospital District of Southwest Finland

Side effects of radiation therapy to the breast

Radiation therapy may have side effects, but they are usually temporary and rarely severe. Side effects may continue even after radiation therapy has ended. Follow these instructions as long as the side effects from radiation therapy continue. Side effects depend on the individual and they depend on the dose and the size of the treated area.

Common side effects

- skin irritation
- redness
- skin feeling hot
- itch
- scaling

Skincare of treated area

- Take care of your hygiene.
- When washing yourself, you should shower the skin of the treatment area with lukewarm water (avoid high water pressure) without soap at least once a day. After showering, gently pat dry the skin using a soft towel.
- Start using moisturizing cream from the beginning of the treatment
- Add a thin layer of moisturizing cream in the area being treated 1–2 times a day, **not before radiation therapy**. You can use milky, water-soluble and unscented moisturizing cream that you can buy at the pharmacy.
- Do not use deodorant or perfume in the area being treated
- You can go to a sauna in mild heat and swimming if the skin is normal. In the sauna, you can cover the skin by a wet towel.
- Do not wear tight or rough-textured clothes in the area being treated
- During radiation therapy, you should not shave armpit hair
- Follow these skin care instructions for as long as the side effects of radiation therapy continue
- Protect the treated area from sunshine for at least a year after the treatment period. In the future, use a sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor of 30

Ask radiation therapists/nurses for more information.

Quit smoking

Quitting smoking is an important part of cancer treatments. Smoking may reduce effectiveness of radiation therapy and deteriorate skin's condition. Smoking also increases the risk of a new cancer. You can get help to quit smoking from doctor and nurses.

Swelling and pain

You can take common painkillers for swelling and pain.

Fatigue

Worrying about the future and daily treatments can cause fatigue. Side effects can also lower your abilities.

Exercise

Continue arm exercises according to instructions given after operation. Do light exercises e.g. outdoor activities, but make sure you get enough rest.

Sex life

Radiation therapy is not an obstacle for sex. Getting sick and treatments may cause inability and reluctance for sex. Discuss problems openly with your partner, nurses and doctor.

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