

After Radiotherapy to the Breast

This leaflet provides you with information on what you may experience, now that you have completed radiotherapy to the breast.

Skin reactions

Your skin may already be pink from radiotherapy. This may get worse after the treatment has ended. It is common for the skin to feel itchy or hot. Take care of your skin until the reaction settles. Wearing cotton next to your skin can also be helpful. Your skin in the treated area will be more sensitive to the sun. Try to avoid exposing the area to the sun for long periods of time and use a sun cream with a high SPF or keep it covered up.

Skin soreness

- It is common for your nipple to become sore during and after radiotherapy. It may help to put the moisturising cream you are using in the fridge so it can be applied cold.
- Many people say that they experience discomfort, shooting pains, a dull pain or breast tenderness.
- It is also common to feel discomfort around the scar area. Often this is relieved with paracetamol (follow the instructions on the packet). **If the pain persists, or if you feel unwell or worried, please discuss this with the radiographers.**
- Sometimes, the skin may break down, blisters may form and the skin may become weepy. **If this happens, please contact the consultant radiographer for advice, as it is important that the area doesn't become infected.**

- You may be advised to use clean non-adherent dressings to absorb moisture. If you have been given hydrocortisone cream, **do not use this on broken skin**

If your skin is itchy

- You could try using a fan or hair dryer that blows **cold** air on the area. The movement of the air can help to take the itch away.
- If you are normally able to use antihistamines, these can be helpful (follow the instructions on the packet).
- Hydrocortisone cream may be helpful for itchy skin if the radiographers have already advised you to use this. If not, contact the radiographers for your skin to be assessed.

Clothing

Avoid wearing tight sleeves, tight jewellery, or tight watches on the affected arm. Wear a well-fitting bra, preferably one that does not mark the skin. Seam free cups that support the whole breast, wide straps and no under wires are recommended.

Tiredness

It is common to feel tired towards the end of treatment and after the radiotherapy finishes. This may happen earlier if you have had chemotherapy. The amount of tiredness varies greatly from person to person as does the length of time it takes for it to go. It is important to stay active, as this can help overcome fatigue. Try and maintain your normal sleeping pattern. Keep well hydrated, drink plenty of fluids, preferably water as this can help with fatigue too.

Lymphoedema

Exercise is important to prevent lymphoedema as it encourages lymphatic fluid to drain which can prevent swelling from occurring. Try to use your arm and shoulder as normally as possible and take regular exercise. Try not to overtire the arm at risk. If it starts to ache, rest. Avoid activities which put a very heavy strain on your arm such as carrying heavy weights, moving furniture, heavy gardening tasks. Continue



to do the exercises that you were given after surgery. In addition include the following:

- Bend and straighten your elbow
- Circle your wrist in one direction, then the other direction
- Make a fist, then relax your hand and straighten your fingers.

Some people enjoy recreational exercise such as swimming, walking or going to the gym and these can all be useful to help prevent lymphoedema. It can also help with your general wellbeing.

Whatever exercise you choose, build up the amount you do gradually and use your arm as a guide to how much you can do.

Emotions

The whole experience of diagnosis and treatment for cancer is frequently both stressful and tiring. While many people pick up fairly soon after the end of treatment and are then able to resume normal or near-normal living, it can sometimes take rather longer than you might have expected to recover.

Allow yourself time to get over this difficult period in your life and don't push yourself too much.

Getting some regular exercise often helps both physically and psychologically. The psychological effects can include anxiety, worry, impatience, depression and a short temper. You may find you have lost your motivation or sense of humour, or find it difficult to feel excited. You may have lost your appetite for social interaction, preferring to stay in. You may experience none of these reactions, but if you are affected by one or more be reassured that they are all normal and should pass with time.

If you are still concerned, please contact the consultant radiographer or your breast care nurse.

You should also be patient with yourself as there can be quite a variation in how long it takes to recover and feel like your old self. But, if any of these feelings become difficult to manage please tell your GP as help of various kinds is available.

If you had your breast surgery in Bath RUH your oncology follow up appointment will be with a trained consultant radiographer.

Radiotherapy department contact details

Telephone: 01225 824853

Monday-Friday 8am-3:30pm

Website: www.ruh.nhs.uk/patients/services/radiotherapy

Consultant radiographer: 01225 824853

Breast Unit RUH: 01225 824057

Other useful phone numbers/websites

Bath RUH cancer information centre: (01225) 82 4049

Macmillan: www.macmillan.org.uk

08088 080000

Life after cancer PocketMedic® have produced some patient information videos, available at www.medic.video/swe15-cancer (Life after cancer)

Look good, feel better

<https://www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/PfizerUK/playlists>

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01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.