

Radiation Therapy to the Chest

You are scheduled to receive radiation therapy designed specifically for you. The following guidelines will help you take an active part in your treatment.

What to Expect During Treatment

Temporary Skin Changes

Temporary skin changes may develop shortly after your treatment begins. Your skin may become red, dry, scaly, or itchy at the treatment site.

- Skin changes usually occur one to two weeks after your treatment begins. These changes may last one to two weeks after your treatment ends. Some patients may experience skin changes sooner.
- Do not put medication patches on the skin in the area where you are receiving radiation.
- You may shower or bathe throughout your radiation therapy. Use a gentle soap on your skin. Pat the skin dry with a soft towel. **Do not** rub the area being treated. Suggested mild soaps include:

- Apply moisturizers to your skin as needed. **Do not** use moisturizers within two hours **before** your scheduled radiation treatment. Suggested moisturizers to use include:

Permanent Skin Changes

Permanent skin changes include increased sensitivity to hot and cold temperatures. If the area being treated is exposed to the sun, apply sunscreen routinely to the treatment site whenever you are outdoors for more than 10 minutes during the summer or winter. A PABA-free sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 should be used. Since the area being treated will be more sensitive than the rest of your skin, protect the area from sun exposure after your treatment ends.

Since the absorption of medication can be permanently changed in the area where you have received radiation, avoid putting medication patches on this skin.

Coughing and Difficulty Swallowing

You may have a cough or difficulty swallowing.

- You may develop a dry cough. The amount of sputum, or mucus, in your cough may increase as your radiation treatment progresses.
- Difficulty swallowing is another common side effect of radiation therapy to the chest. You may feel as if you have a “lump” in your throat or a feeling of food getting stuck. This is a common sensation. Your throat is not “closing,” even though it may feel that way.
- You may feel short of breath. Pace yourself, and plan activities with rest periods.

- Drink six to eight glasses of fluids a day, unless your doctor has restricted the amount of fluids you can drink because of another medical condition. Use cough drops, cough medicine, and throat sprays to make your throat more comfortable. Your nurse or doctor can prescribe or suggest products that may be helpful to you.
- Use a cool-air vaporizer, or place pans of water on a heat source to keep the air moist in your room. Change the water in the pans daily.
- Do not smoke. Avoid being around people who smoke, and avoid smoke-filled rooms. Smoke can irritate your throat and lungs.
- Avoid going outside on hot, humid days or on very cold days. Being outdoors in very hot or cold weather may irritate your lungs.
- Elevate your head and upper body when you sleep to help you to breathe easier.
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing. Do not wear a tight bra or shirt collar.

Diet and Eating Difficulties

Eating may become more difficult during your treatments. Weight loss may occur. A dietitian is available to discuss any concerns about your diet.

- Maintain an adequate diet. Eat small amounts of food more often, rather than three large meals a day, to avoid feeling bloated.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Eat foods that are easy to chew and swallow, such as pudding, cheese and other dairy products, or other soft foods.
- Cut foods into small pieces or puree your food in a blender to make swallowing easier. Adding sauces and gravies to foods may also help.
- Food that is served cold or at room temperature may be easier to eat than hot foods.
- Avoid eating citrus fruits (such as oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes, and tomatoes) or foods that are spicy, salty, rough, or dry.
- Ask your nurse or doctor if you need to take nutritional supplements.
- Registered dietitians are available to discuss your diet with you and your family.

Things to Report to Your Nurse or Doctor

Tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Redness and/or tenderness of the skin
- Persistent cough
- Blood-streaked mucus
- Decrease in appetite
- Difficulty or discomfort when swallowing
- Weight loss of 5 pounds or more in one week
- Any new or unusual symptoms

Things to Report Immediately

Call immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Increase in shortness of breath
- Temperature of 100.5°F (38°C) or above
- Unusual bleeding
- Chest pain
- Chills

In an Emergency, Call:
