

# Helpful tips for minimizing the side effects of radiation

## **Skin management**

There are several hormone-blocking medications available, all with proven benefits against ER-positive breast cancer. Studies in breast cancer patients with joint symptoms have found that at least 50 percent of patients will experience significant improvement in their symptoms after switching to a different hormone-blocking medication.

### \* **Skin cleansing**

To cleanse properly, use lukewarm water and a mild soap such as Dove, Basis, Neutrogena or Aveeno Oatmeal Soap. Wash the area gently and pat it dry with a soft towel. Do not scrub, rub or massage. Pay particular attention to the fold beneath your breast and the underarm. Apply moisturizing cream twice daily after your bath or shower.

### \* **Avoid lotions and deodorants.**

Consult your nurse, therapist or radiation oncologist before applying any creams, ointments, lotions, powders or deodorants to the area. Some products can increase your skin irritation during treatment.

### \* **Hair loss**

Any hair in the treatment area in the armpit may shed within the first few weeks of radiation therapy. It will often re-grow approximately three to six months after completing your therapy. Please do not shave your treated underarm during your radiation treatments.

### \* **Choose your clothing carefully.**

Avoid wearing underwire bras or other tight-fitting clothing that will rub or irritate you. Loose-fitting clothing made from soft cotton will be the most comfortable. The therapist will mark your skin with indelible ink that can come off on whatever you're wearing. Protect your apparel with suitable underclothes, such as an undershirt.

### \* **Protect your breast from temperature changes.**

Do not apply ice packs, hot water bottles or heating pads to the treatment area during therapy for one month following treatment without first consulting your nurse or radiation oncologist.

### \* **Stay out of the sun.**

Do not expose the treatment area to direct sunlight.

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## ***Eat sensibly.***

Maintain a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. If you have questions about your nutrition, please speak to your nurse or the nutritionist.

## ***Discomfort***

If your breast becomes painful, it may be due to swelling induced by the therapy. This can occur during treatment and may continue for two to three weeks after treatment is completed. The pain is often experienced as a sharp, shooting sensation in the breast. You may also experience tenderness and soreness in the breast and chest wall area.

## ***Sexual activity***

Sexual desire or performance may change during your treatment. These changes vary greatly from one person to another. Please discuss your concerns with your radiation oncologist or nurse.

## ***Fatigue***

You may notice that you become increasingly tired during the last weeks of your treatment course. This is not unusual. Try to rest or take a nap if possible if you are tired, or get more sleep at night. Usually after rest, your energy level increases. Low-level exercise such as walking or light weights has been shown to increase your energy level. Please discuss appropriate types of exercise with your radiation oncologist or nurse.

## ***Counseling***

We understand the special needs and concerns you and your family are experiencing. Sometimes you can experience anxiety or depression. Our social services counselor can speak with you and recommend appropriate support groups and psychological counseling — if needed — and can refer you to the any valuable resources.

