

Radiation Side Effects: Breast

What side effects can I expect from radiation therapy?

Side effects from radiation therapy vary from person to person and depend on the part of the body being treated, the dose of radiation given, the size of the treatment area and if you are receiving chemotherapy prior, during or after radiation. Side effects may happen with radiation therapy because the high doses of radiation used to kill cancer cells can also damage healthy cells in the treatment area. Some people have more intense side effects whereas others have none at all. Your team will discuss the specific side effects they anticipate you to experience.

What skin changes may occur?

Skin changes can occur in the area being treated with radiation. Make sure to keep the area being treated clean and dry prior to your radiation treatments. Do not apply any moisturizers, ointments, deodorants, powders, or cosmetics to this area. You may continue to bathe or shower as you have been however we recommend using a mild soap, rinse and pat dry. Skin changes from radiation usually don't occur until a few weeks into your radiation treatments. Please discuss skin care as well as recommended skin care products with your medical team.

Will I experience fatigue?

Fatigue is a very common side effect from radiation therapy and you will probably experience it at some point during your radiation treatments. Typically, patients will feel most fatigued toward the end of radiation. Fatigue includes feelings of tiredness, exhaustion, and/or decreased amount of energy to complete tasks. Make sure you are getting adequate amount of sleep at

night aiming for 8 hours per night. Maintain a balanced, nutritious diet and incorporate some sort of exercise which often helps to decrease fatigue. Pace activities or group them together and take rest periods when needed or an earlier bedtime. Allow others to help you with tasks or errands. Fatigue usually continues well after radiation has completed, approximately 6-8 weeks, and sometimes even longer for some.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by UMHS and for which UMHS does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Reviewers: Molly Brummond, RN, James Hayman MD, Jill James RN, Victor Hola RN, Dawn Johnson

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health System](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 11/2016