

## Risks and side-effects

The following are common short term side effects during radiotherapy treatment:

- Your skin can become sore. You might notice that the skin becomes darker; if you are Asian or African-Caribbean this may be more noticeable. In some patients this could be a permanent change.
- Underarm hair may reduce or stop growing. It usually returns to normal after treatment stops.
- Your breast may start to feel heavy or look swollen. This is not unusual and your breast will return to normal after treatment. Wear a supportive bra as advised. You can take over the counter painkillers if you still have discomfort.
- There is no need to drastically alter your lifestyle during treatment, but you may feel more tired than usual. This may be related to your illness, or to your treatment. It is very important to get the right balance between rest and exercise (speak to one of our nurses for further advice).

## How long will the side effects last?

A month after your treatment, the side effects should be much less noticeable. If your skin continues to feel sore, then carry on following the advice in this leaflet. If you need further support once your treatment has finished, please contact the Radiotherapy Department.

## For more information

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

## Contact us

### Radiotherapy Department

Basement, King George V Wing (KGV) St Bartholomew's Hospital  
 West Smithfield, London EC1A 7BE  
 Tel: 020 3465 5222 9am - 5pm Mon - Fri  
 Out of hours emergency hotline: 07917 093 738

### Vicky Clement-Jones Macmillan Cancer Information Centre

Ground Floor West Wing, St Bartholomew's Hospital Mon-Fri 10am-12noon and 2-4.30pm  
 Tel: 020 7601 7586

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service

If you need general information or advice about Trust services, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on [www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals](http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals). Alternatively please contact staff who are providing your care if you require clinical advice.

### Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.

For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 8223 8934.

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## Patient information

# Radiotherapy to the breast or chest wall

## Important

Please tell us if you have a pacemaker as we will need to monitor your heart during your treatment.

Please let us know if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.



## What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy rays to treat cancer. A special radiation machine called a radiotherapy linear accelerator (Linac) delivers your treatment to your breast. Radiation is invisible and painless, though you are likely to experience some side effects which will be discussed later in this leaflet. No equipment will be put inside your body during the treatment.

## How long will I have treatment for?

Sessions are usually scheduled from Monday to Friday for up to six weeks. However you may have more or less than this, depending on your treatment plan.

## What happens when you have radiotherapy?

- When you arrive for your radiotherapy, please book in at reception. The radiographers will be responsible for giving you your treatment and for your day-to-day care.
- On your first day of radiotherapy treatment, the radiographers will explain the treatment procedure and side effects to you. You will be given an appointment list and some useful telephone numbers.
- The radiographers will ask you to get changed into a gown in one of the cubicles, and remove any clothing and jewellery from the top half of your body. Once you are lying on the treatment couch the radiographers will get you into the correct treatment position. They will check various

measurements before delivering your treatment.

- The machine may come close to you but it will not touch you at any point. The radiographers operate the machine from outside the treatment room. The linac will make a noise when switched on. You will be left alone when the machine is working, but the radiographers are able to watch you on a closed circuit television system. If you need the radiographers to come back to you, all you have to do is raise your hand and they will come back into the room.
- The treatment lasts between 10 – 20 minutes every day. Most of this time is taken getting you into the correct position for treatment. You will only be left alone for a few minutes whilst the radiation is switched on. This routine will be the same every time you come for treatment. You will see your doctor towards the end of your treatment.

Please be aware that you may be treated by a combination of male and female radiographers and we cannot guarantee to accommodate a 'male staff only' or 'female staff only' request.

## Skin care

The following advice will help you look after your skin during treatment:

- You can wash, shower or bath normally, but only use products recommended by your radiographer. Other products might irritate your skin. Treat your skin gently, do not rub or scrub. When drying gently pat with a soft towel.
- You can use an underarm deodorant or anti-perspirant that does not contain

aluminium. Please ask the radiographers for examples of such deodorants if required.

- Avoid extremes of temperature, for example direct sunlight, hot water bottles, electric blankets, and ice packs.
- Do not shave your armpit during treatment and until any skin reaction has settled. Do not wax your armpit for at least six weeks after your radiotherapy.
- Applying the recommended cream to the skin will help keep it moist and comfortable. However if you notice that your skin is feeling sore, please let the radiographers know so that they can advise you what to do.

## General information

- Avoid tight fitting clothes around the treatment area.
- Do not wear your silicone prosthesis during treatment to avoid a skin reaction.
- Wear loose, comfortable cotton underwear and avoid under wired or frilly, lacy bras that can irritate your skin during treatment.
- We recommend you wear a supportive cotton bra until your radiotherapy treatment is complete as your breast may change shape during this time.
- If you have a fan at home, lie on your back with your arm raised to allow the cool air to reach the area to alleviate excess heat.

You are not radioactive and therefore can be around children and pregnant women.