

## INTRODUCTION

Your Radiation Oncologist has decided that you would benefit from a course of Radiation Therapy to the breast/chest wall area. This treatment is designed specifically for you.

Your Radiation Therapy is designed to minimise side effects as much as possible, but we want to warn you about potential side effects, so that you are not alarmed if/when they develop. The side-effects of radiotherapy are usually felt only in the area that you are having treated.

The Radiation Therapy is used to treat the whole breast or chest wall on the affected side of the body to ensure that any microscopic cells remaining after surgery and/or chemotherapy are eradicated. Lymph nodes around the clavicle area (collar bone) or axilla area (under arm) may

the treatment is over. Please follow the advice in our Information leaflet on Skin Care during Radiation Therapy.

You may shower or bathe throughout your radiation therapy. Be gentle with the skin in the treatment area while washing; do not rub or scrub too hard; use gentle, non-deodorant soaps (such as Simple soap) on your skin, or plain water. Pat the skin dry with a clean, soft towel; do not rub. Try to allow the area under the breast to air dry completely before dressing.

- Avoid under wired bras; wear only a loose cotton bra or vest, and go without a bra as much as possible.
- Do not use any moisturisers, lotions, creams or fake tan on the treatment area.
- Do not shave, wax or use hair removal creams on your underarm on the treatment side.

Some patients develop small red blotches on the breast caused by dilated blood vessels under the skin. This condition is known as telangiectasia and is not harmful.

### **Breast Changes:**

Mild swelling of the breast may occur during treatment. These changes will decrease slowly over time. You may experience occasional warm sensations, tingling, or mild shooting pains in your breast. These sensations decrease slowly over time. Some patients develop a hardening or thickening of the breast tissue (fibrosis). This can cause the breast to become harder and smaller than it was.

### **Arm Motion:**

If you have had surgery as part of your overall treatment, you may notice some of your arm movements are slightly restricted. Radiation Therapy may increase this

be included.

#### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING TREATMENT?

**Remember! Everyone is different and not everyone will experience all of these reactions.**

#### **Fatigue/Tiredness:**

Rest when possible. Follow the advice in our Information Leaflet on Fatigue.

#### **Temporary Skin Changes:**

Temporary skin changes within the treated area may occur. These can include redness, dryness, scaling, and itching of the treated area. Skin changes occur one to two weeks after your treatment begins and may last for a few weeks after

- Avoid using deodorants, talc or other powders under the arm on the treated side.
- Do not put medication patches on the skin in the treatment area.
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing as much as possible, and avoid harsh fabrics next to your skin.

#### **Permanent Skin Changes:**

Permanent skin changes can include increased sensitivity to hot and cold temperatures and sometimes a darker coloration (hyper-pigmentation) in the treated area. The area being treated will always be more sensitive than the rest of your skin, protect the area from sun exposure after your treatment ends.

problem and cause arm stiffness. It can occur at any time even after treatment finishes. Regular exercise to these joints and muscles can help you regain the full range of arm motion and prevent stiffness.

#### **Lymphoedema:**

Swelling called lymphedema can develop if the lymph nodes have been removed with surgery or are damaged by radiation. It more commonly affects the arm, but can also cause swelling of the breast. This will be monitored during your treatment, but do let us know if you think this is becoming a problem for you.

**Contraception Concerns:**

Birth control is strongly recommended during treatment. Radiation Therapy may pose risks to an unborn child. Please discuss this with your Doctor if you have any concerns.

**After Radiation Therapy Finishes:**

The side-effects reach a peak about 7-10 days after you have finished treatment. The side effects may become worse before they start to improve. This is normal and your reactions will gradually settle. Please continue to follow the advice you have been given.

There may be a small risk of long term, or late, permanent effects from radiotherapy. These will have been discussed with you by your Consultant.

Please use this space for questions and notes.

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**RADIATION THERAPY  
TO THE BREAST**



**All the side effects relevant to your Radiation Therapy will be fully discussed with you before your treatment begins.**

**If you have any questions or problems at any time during your treatment, bring them to the attention of anyone on your radiation therapy treatment team – they are the best people to advise and help you.**

**USEFUL INFORMATION**

**Address:** UPMC Whitfield Cancer Centre,  
Cork Road, Co. Waterford

**Telephone:** 051337444

**Website:** [UPMCWhitfieldCancerCentre.ie](http://UPMCWhitfieldCancerCentre.ie)