

Patient Education

Breast or Chest Wall Radiation Treatment Guide

Thank you for choosing Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center for your radiation treatment. The following information will help you understand your treatment process as we work together toward your recovery.

This material contains standard information and procedures. Because each patient receives individualized treatment, your healthcare team will give you specific information for you and your caregivers to follow which may not be the same as in this document. Please follow the instructions you receive from your nurse or doctor.

Radiation Treatment

Radiation treatment, sometimes called radiotherapy, effectively treats cancer by using high-energy rays to pinpoint and destroy cancer cells. Although radiation treatment is similar to having a chest X-ray, the dose of radiation in cancer treatment is higher and is given over a longer period of time. Many forms of radiation are available. The best choice for you depends on the type of cancer you have, the extent of the cancer and its location.

Treatments are given every day, Monday through Friday, and in some cases may be given twice daily, about six hours apart. The number of treatments you will have may be discussed with you at the time of your consult, simulation and weekly doctor visit.

Your Health Care Team

Many different specialists will participate in planning your treatment and monitoring and treating you during your radiation treatment. Your health care team may include doctors, mid-level providers (such as a physician assistant or advanced practice nurse), nurses, therapists, dosimetrists, physicists, your care partner and others.

If the process seems overwhelming to you, please talk with your health care team about your concerns. They are here to help and support you and your caregiver during your treatment.

Consult Visit

You will have a consult visit before you receive radiation. You will meet with your nurse and doctor to discuss your individual treatment plan. Your nurse may give you educational materials at that time and you may sign consents for treatment.

Simulation

Before you receive radiation treatments, you will undergo a simulation, which is a treatment planning session. The simulation allows your radiation doctor to locate the exact area to be treated, to take measurements for treatment planning and to create shielding to protect normal tissue. This session usually takes about one hour to complete. Upon receiving authorization from your insurance company, our staff will call you to schedule your simulation. A simulation is usually completed within 5-7 days of your consult. You should receive a call from a radiation therapist with a date to start treatment 5-7 days after your simulation. This will allow time for your health care team to design your treatment plan and make your cradle.

During the simulation:

- Your health team will make a customized mold for you, called a cradle. The cradle is shaped specifically for your body and is used during each treatment to ensure consistent positioning during your treatments.
- A computerized tomography (CT) scan and X-rays will be taken. These are used to create a three-dimensional picture of the treatment area.
- Marks will be made on your skin to ensure that the radiation is aimed at the same area during each treatment. To help secure the marks, some of them may be covered with tape. The marking ink will stain your clothes or anything it comes in contact with. Under your clothing, wear a soft undershirt or a cotton T-shirt to absorb any stains from the marking fluid. These marks will be redrawn by the therapist if they fade or if your doctor wants to change them as your treatment progresses.
- Be careful not to wash off the lines when showering. Swimming or soaking in a bath tub will cause the lines to wash off. If you are concerned that the lines are fading too much before your first treatment, you may call the clinic to speak with a member of your health care team. You may be instructed to come in during clinic hours to have them touched up by a therapist. Do not wash off the marks until a member of your health care team tells you that you may do so. Do not pull off the tape, even if it is hanging loosely. By doing so, skin may pull off with the tape. The therapist can replace the tape or trim it for you.

Treatment Schedule

Radiation treatments are usually scheduled every weekday, Monday through Friday, allowing you to rest on Saturday and Sunday. You will receive all of your treatments in the outpatient clinic. We will notify you if the clinic plans to close for a scheduled holiday. Ask your radiation therapist if you have questions regarding your radiation treatment schedule or need to change your schedule. Due to the number of patients we serve, schedule requests are not guaranteed.

Weekly Management Visits

While you are under treatment, you will have an appointment with your radiation doctor once or twice a week. When you arrive for your management visit, check in at the main desk and the clinic window. Please be patient, as there are many reasons the clinic may run behind schedule. Tell the receptionist if you have waited for more than 15 minutes.

Schedule Changes

Your weekly management visits may change during holidays and when your doctor is out.

Treatment Guidelines

- Always check in at the reception desk in the radiation treatment lobby as soon as you arrive.
- If you are going to see the doctor or nurse in clinic, check in here also.
- You may be asked to put on a gown or remove some clothing to show the marks.
- The treatment itself is short, lasting only a few minutes, but it may take 15-30 minutes in the treatment room before you are finished. A staff person will help you on and off the treatment table.
- Although the treatment machines are large and may be noisy when in use, try to relax and breathe normally.
- Once you are positioned, do not move until the therapist tells you that you are finished with the treatment. You will be in the same position every day for your treatment.
- When you are positioned on the table, the therapist will leave the room, close the door and monitor you by closed-circuit television. If you need something during treatment, you can speak to your therapist over the intercom in the room. If necessary, the therapist can turn off the machine and come into the room immediately. The radiation will stop when the machine is turned off.

Coping with Side Effects

Side effects will depend on the part of the body being treated and the stage of the tumor. Most side effects will improve within a few weeks after your treatment has stopped. Your mid-level provider or doctor will review side effects with you during your consult visit. Tell your doctor, mid-level provider or nurse if you have any side effects.

General Skin Care

- Skin in the treatment area may itch, become red and peel during the last few weeks of radiation treatment.
- Avoid scratching your skin. Patting the skin is okay. Ask your doctor, mid-level provider or nurse about medicine to help relieve the itching. Use only the products that they have approved.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes. Many patients find that loose fitting cotton clothing, such as tee-shirts are more comfortable.
- Do not wear bras with wires or heavy prosthetic bras. Some women find that inexpensive sports bras work well.
- You may wear a bra on the outside of a T-shirt if it is more comfortable; however, some women do not wear a bra while they have side effects. If you wear a bra, it will be permanently stained with the ink used to draw the lines on your skin.

Under Arm Care

- The skin under your arm may become sensitive after the first few weeks of treatment.
- Do not shave under your arm or use a depilatory on the side being treated.
- Although you may notice a decrease in perspiration during treatment, you may use some deodorants or cornstarch if needed. Check with your nurse about which deodorants are okay to use. Tip: Put cornstarch in a clean, dry sock and secure the open end with a rubber band. Keep this in a sealed plastic bag. Use it any time you feel moist under the arm. A light dusting is sufficient.

Sun Exposure

- The treated skin will sunburn quickly after radiation treatments, so try to avoid sun exposure to the treated area.
- Cover the treatment area with clothing if you will be in the sun for more than 10 minutes.
- Do not use sunscreen in the treated area while you are receiving radiation treatment.

Bathing

- Do not soak in bathtub for any period of time until your skin has fully healed and/or your doctor has approved you to do so.
- Avoid hot showers during treatment. Steam will cause the lines to fade.
- In a warm shower, allow the water to run over the treated area. Use a mild moisturizing soap without deodorant or perfumes. Use your hands as a washcloth.
- Gently pat the skin dry or allow it to air dry.
- Using deodorant or antiperspirant is okay.

Stretching

- You may feel tightness in your arm and shoulder after a few weeks of treatment.
- You will need to do stretching exercises during your treatment to prevent tightness.
- Refer to the exercises in this handout.

Fatigue

- You may feel more tired than usual. This is not uncommon.
- Do not overexert yourself and get plenty of rest.
- Try to exercise 20 minutes every day. This will help prevent severe radiation fatigue that may occur in the last week or two of treatment.

Nutrition

- It is very important to eat well and not lose weight during treatment.
- Eat high-protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, nuts, milk and milk shakes.
- You can meet with a dietitian if you would like more information about your diet.

Sexual Activity

- You may engage in sexual activity if it is comfortable for you.
- It is extremely important to prevent pregnancy while you are receiving radiation treatment.
- Talk to your doctor before taking hormones, birth control pills, herbal products or using hormone creams.
- If you are considering pregnancy after you complete treatment, please speak with your doctor. Your doctor can help you decide when this will be safe for you and your baby.

Follow-Up Care

- Your follow-up appointment with your radiation doctor will be scheduled within four to six weeks after treatment. Please call or stop by our checkout after one of your weekly visits to make this appointment, prior to the end of your treatment process.
- In the future, if you need surgical procedures or biopsies that involve the treated areas, tell your doctor about the radiation you received. If necessary, your family doctor can contact your oncologist for more information.
- Your referring doctor will receive a summary report of your radiation treatment. It is very important for you to have follow-up visits with your referring doctor, your medical oncologist (cancer doctor) and your primary care doctor.

Home Care Instructions

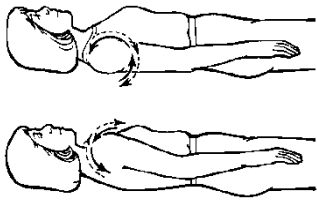
After you have finished your treatments, it is important to follow these instructions:

- Do not smoke, as there is a higher risk of lung cancer after breast irradiation in women who continue to smoke.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink fluids to speed the healing process.
- Give your skin time to heal. Do not wear a heavy prosthetic bra for a few weeks after your final treatment; it may irritate the skin. Wear lightweight foam prosthesis if needed.
- Do not wear an under-wire bra. The wire can cause heavy pressure marks on the skin causing irritation or sores.
- Continue the stretching exercises to prevent arm and shoulder stiffness.

- Contact your nurse if you have any new symptoms such as sores, lumps or other unusual signs, especially if they last a few weeks. The nurse will direct you to the appropriate resource.
- Bathing:
 - You may bathe the treated area when your doctor or nurse tells you that it is okay.
 - If your skin is intact and tanned, you may be able to bathe immediately after treatment.
 - Use lukewarm water and a mild moisturizing soap without deodorant or perfumes.
 - Use your hand as a washcloth for the first few weeks. Gently pat the skin dry in the treated area and apply the moisturizing ointment recommended by your doctor.
 - Use the ointment three times per day. You may use the ointment more often if needed for two to three weeks; then use lotion or creams daily.
 - Do not soak in a bath tub for prolonged periods of time for the first few weeks after completing treatment. Your doctor, mid-level provider or nurse will tell you when you may bathe in a bath tub. When it is okay to bathe in a bath tub, use lukewarm water for the first few weeks. Afterward, you may use warmer water.
- Skin care:
 - Apply Aquaphor[®], or a product your doctor has recommended, to the treated skin for the length of time prescribed or until the product is completely used. Afterwards, apply a daily moisturizer to the treated skin. Examples include, but are not limited to, Nivea[®] cream, Eucerin[®] cream, and Cetaphil[®] cream. Avoid creams or lotions that contain perfume due to drying effect they have on the skin.
 - The treated area may remain sensitive to injury. Do not expose the treated skin to extreme changes in temperature. Avoid using an ice pack, heating pad or a hot water bottle.
 - Avoid sun exposure to the treated area. The skin that was exposed to radiation will sunburn more quickly. If the treated area will be exposed to the sun for 10 minutes or longer, apply a sunscreen to the area with an SPF rating of 30-45.

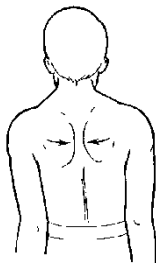
Exercises after Breast Surgery (Without Drains)

- Begin these exercises **immediately** after your surgery if your surgeon approves.
- Patients with drains in place begin the exercises “with drains” and then perform the exercises “without drains” once their drainage tubes have been removed.
- These exercises are designed to improve the range of motion (flexibility) and strength of your shoulder and arm.
- You will feel some tightness in your chest and underarm after surgery. This is normal; the tightness will decrease as you continue with your exercise program.
- Many women experience a burning, tingling, or soreness on the back of the arm and/or chest wall. This occurs because the surgery irritated nerve endings. Although the sensations may increase a few weeks after surgery, continue to do the exercises, unless you notice unusual swelling or tenderness.
- You should do the exercises so you feel a slow stretch. Do not bounce or jerk your arm when doing the exercises.
- Continue doing these exercises until you have achieved full shoulder range of motion, which should occur within one to two months post-surgery.
- If you continue to have limitation of motion or difficulty resuming normal dressing, bathing, grooming, or other daily activities, ask your physician for specific instructions or for a referral to a Physical Therapist.



1. Lie on your back with your shoulders relaxed.
2. Slowly rotate your shoulders backward.
3. Repeat, rotating your shoulders forward.
4. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day.

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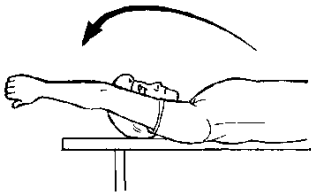
1. Lie on your back with your arms at your sides.
2. Pinch your shoulder blades together as shown.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day

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1. Lie on your back. Grasp your elbow (that is on the side of your breast surgery) with your other hand as shown.
2. Pull the elbow and arm across your chest so that you feel a stretch.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day.



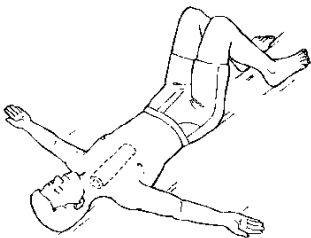
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1. Lie on your back as shown.
2. Raise your arm (that is on the side of your breast surgery) up overhead as far as you can. Lead with your thumb and keep your elbow straight.
3. Hold for 5 seconds and slowly lower your arm.
4. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day.



┌ PhysioTools Ltd

1. Lie on your back with your hands behind your neck and your elbows pointing toward the ceiling.
2. Move your elbows apart and down to touch the bed.
3. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day.



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1. Roll up a small towel so that it makes a firm roll 2-3 inches thick.
2. Lie on your back with the towel aligned between your shoulder blades as shown.
3. Stay in this position for 5 minutes.
4. Do 3 times per day.



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1. Standing, reach behind your back with your arm (that is on the side of your breast surgery).
2. Grasp your arm (that is on the side of your breast surgery) with your other hand.
3. Try to pull your arm upward as shown so that you feel a gentle stretch in your shoulder.
4. Hold for 5 seconds.
5. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day.



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1. Stand in a corner about 1-2 feet from the wall with your hands on the wall as shown.
2. Lean into the corner so that you feel a stretch in your shoulder (that is on the side of your breast surgery) and the front of your chest.
3. Vary the stretch by moving your arms higher or lower, or by standing farther away from the wall.
4. Hold for 30 seconds.
5. Do 5 repetitions, 3 times per day.

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