



## **SKIN CARE: BREAST RADIOTHERAPY**

### **Prevent irritation before and after daily treatments**

- **Wear loose-fitting shirts, preferably cotton.**
- **Use warm rather than hot water while showering.**
- **Try to not let shower water fall directly on your breast.**
- **Avoid harsh soaps and soaps with fragrances**
- **To help prevent redness and skin irritation, avoid having skin-on-skin contact.**

#### **This most often happens:**

- **where your arm presses against your armpit and the outer portion of your breast**
- **along the bottom crease of your breast, where your breast might droop a bit and lie up against your upper belly wall**
- **along your cleavage where the breasts snuggle up against each other**

#### **To avoid skin-on-skin contact:**

- **Try to keep your arm away from your body whenever possible.**
- **Wear a strong bra without an underwire to keep your breasts separated and lifted.**
- **If you have large breasts, when you're not wearing a bra, stick a soft washcloth or piece of flannel or soft cotton under your breast.**
- **Regularly dust the breast area and inside skin folds with corn-starch to absorb moisture, reduce friction, and keep you smelling fresh. You can use baby powder made from corn-starch (don't use talc) or sifted kitchen corn-starch. Apply it with a clean makeup brush or put some corn-starch into a single knee-high nylon or thin sock and knot it at the top. Gently tap the sock against the skin to dust the surface. If your doctor has recommended using creams or salves, apply those first, then dust the area with the corn-starch.**
- **With or without radiation, yeast infections are common in the skin fold under each breast — particularly during warm weather in women with large breasts. Signs of yeast infections are redness, itchiness, and sometimes a faint white substance on the skin. If you have a yeast infection, take care of it before radiation starts so it gets better, not worse. An anti-fungal cream (such as athlete's foot medicine) usually works well.**



## **Manage irritation during and after your course of radiation**

- **At the beginning of treatment, before you have any side effects, moisturize the skin after your daily treatment with an ointment such as A&D, Eucerin, Aquaphor, Biafene, or Radiacare. You also can put it on at night — wear an old T-shirt so the ointment doesn't get on your bed clothes.**
- **For mild pinkness, itching, and burning, apply an aloe vera preparation. Or try 1% hydrocortisone cream (available without a prescription at any drugstore). Spread the cream thinly over the affected area 3 times a day.**
- **If areas become red, itchy, sore, and start to burn, and low-potency cream no longer relieves your symptoms, ask your doctor for a stronger steroid cream available by prescription. Examples include 2.5% hydrocortisone cream and bethamethasone.**
- **Some people get some relief by blowing air on the area with a hair dryer set to "cool" or "air" (no heat).**
- **Don't wear a bra if there are raw areas.**
- **If your skin becomes dry and flakey during the course of your treatment, moisturize frequently and cleanse skin gently.**
- **If your skin forms a blister or peels in a wet way, leave the top of the blister alone! The bubble keeps the area clean while the new skin grows back underneath. If the blister opens, the exposed raw area can be painful and weepy. Keep the area relatively dry and wash it with warm water only. Blot the area dry and then apply a NON-ADHERENT dressing, such as Xeroform dressings (laden with soothing petroleum jelly) or "second skin" dressings made by several companies. To relieve discomfort from blistering or peeling, take an over-the-counter pain reliever, or ask your doctor for a prescription if you need it.**

## **What about sun exposure during radiation therapy?**

- **During radiation, it's best to keep the treated area completely out of the sun.**
- **Wear a bathing suit with a high neckline.**
- **Wear a cover-up when you're not in the water.**
- **Wear an oversized cotton shirt to cover the treated area and allow it to breathe.**
- **Avoid chlorine. Chlorine is very drying and can make your skin reaction worse.**



- **If you do swim in a pool, you might want to spread petroleum jelly (a product like Vaseline) on the treated area to keep chlorinated water away from your skin.**

**After your radiation treatment is done, the skin that has been exposed to radiation may be more sensitive to the sun than it was in the past. You can go out in the sun and have fun, but continue to protect your skin:**

- **Use a sunblock that is rated SPF 30 or higher on the area that was treated. (A strong sunblock is a very good policy for every inch of your body.)**
- **Apply the sunblock 30 minutes before you go out in the sun.**
- **Reapply the sunblock every few hours, as well as when you get out of the water.**