

Managing the Side Effects of Radiation Therapy

Caring For Your Skin

Skin reactions may occur where your body receives radiation. Your skin may become dry, itchy, red, and peeling. It may darken in that spot, like a tan. To care for your skin:

- Don't scrub or use soap on the treatment area.
- Ask your therapy team what lotion to use.
- Avoid sun on the treated area. Ask your team about using a sunscreen.
- Do not remove ink marks unless your radiation therapist says you can. Don't scrub or use soap on the marks when you wash. Let water run over them and pat them dry.
- Protect your skin from heat or cold. Avoid hot tubs, saunas, hot pads, ice packs, etc.
- Wear soft, loose clothing to avoid rubbing skin.



Fighting Fatigue

The cancer itself or the radiation therapy may cause you to feel tired. Your body is working hard to heal and repair itself. To feel better:

- Try light exercise each day. Take short walks.
- Plan tasks for the times when you tend to have the most energy. Ask for help when you need it.
- Relax before you go to bed to sleep better. Try reading or listening to soothing music.

Site-Specific Side Effects

- Hair loss may occur in the area being treated. The hair often grows back after treatment.
- Your mouth or throat can become dry or sore if the head or neck is being treated. Sip cool water to help ease discomfort.
- Bowel changes can happen with radiation to the pelvic region. Tell your doctor if you have diarrhea or constipation. You may be given a special diet.

Coping with Appetite Changes

Tell your therapy team if you find it hard to eat or have no appetite. You may be referred to a nutritionist, a specialist in meal planning. To keep your strength up, you need to eat well and maintain your weight. Think of healthy eating as part of your treatment. Try these tips:

- Eat slowly.
- Eat small meals several times a day.
- Eat more food when you're feeling better.
- Ask others to keep you company when you eat.
- Stock up on easy-to-prepare foods.
- Eat foods high in protein and calories.
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
- Ask your doctor before taking any vitamins.



Having side effects of radiation therapy does not mean that your cancer is getting worse or that therapy isn't working. Radiation therapy uses high-energy x-rays to kill cancer cells. Some normal cells can also be affected and result in side effects, such as dry skin, fatigue, or appetite changes. Most side effects heal when your radiation therapy is over.