



## Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy to the Breast Area

### Other:

- + It is important to increase your fluid intake while on treatment. Try to increase your daily intake by at least three glasses. Include fluids such as water, milk and juices. Try to reduce tea, coffee and caffeine drinks.
- + Smoking – try to avoid smoking if possible. There is a smoking cessation officer available in the hospital to give you advice and support to help you quit smoking.

It can be difficult to get through a long course of treatment without feeling low at some point. It is quite normal to feel ‘up and down’ during radiation therapy and for several weeks afterwards. Please let us when things get tough and we will do our best to help you.

### After Treatment:

Radiation therapy is a cumulative treatment. Any reactions that you have had may persist for several weeks after you finish your treatment. These reactions are usually most severe in the 1-2 weeks following treatment. You should continue to follow any advice given until these side effects have subsided.

On your final day of treatment you will be given an appointment to see the doctor in approximately 6-8 weeks. At this appointment the doctor will discuss your progress.

We are here to help. If you would like more information on any aspect of your treatment or you are troubled by anything, please speak to us.

### Contact Telephone Numbers:

Radiation Therapy Reception: 021-4922492

LA 1: 021-4922479

LA 2: 021-4922478

LA 3: 021-4921307

LA 4: 021-4921308



## Radiation Therapy to the Breast Area

This leaflet aims to provide information for patients receiving a course of radiation therapy to the breast area, usually following surgery. Your doctor may have already talked to you about this treatment but please ask if anything is still worrying you, however small you think it is. Each course of treatment is tailored to the individual, so your treatment plan may not be the same as somebody else's.

### Daily Procedure:

- + The radiation therapists will position you on the treatment couch using the tattoos on your skin. It is important to be as relaxed as possible and try not to help them if they are moving you.
- + Once you are correctly positioned try not to move. You can breathe normally.
- + During treatment the radiation therapists will leave the room. They will watch you on monitors so if you have any problems just raise your hand. There is also an intercom system which allows you to speak to them should you need to.
- + You will not see or feel anything, but you will hear the machine switch on. The machine will move around you but will not touch you.
- + It is important that you do not move until a radiation therapist has told you that your treatment has finished.

### Review Clinics:

- + A member of your consultant's medical team or a radiation therapist will see you routinely once a week. However we can arrange for you to see a doctor at any stage during your treatment should you need to.
- + You will also have a blood test twice during your course of treatment. This will be done once at the beginning and again at the end of your course of treatment.

### Side Effects:

The radiation therapy process is painless and unlikely to make you feel unwell. However there are some side effects associated with radiation therapy. You may notice one or more of them developing over the course of your treatment. Please note that it is rare for one patient to have all of these side effects.

### Skin Reaction

A skin reaction may occur in the treated area. It is common for skin soreness to develop during the course of treatment. This often happens in the area below the breast and in the armpit. It happens because the skin surfaces can rub against each other. To help reduce any reaction it may be better not to wear a bra at home. By the end of the treatment your skin in the treated area may be itchy, dry and reddened. Aqueous cream should be applied twice daily. If your skin gets worse, the radiation therapists, nurses or doctor can give you another cream. It is important to take extra care of the skin in the treatment area. Certain precautions should be taken:

- + You may gently bathe or shower using warm water.
- + Wash the treatment area using un-perfumed soap such as baby soap. The radiation therapists will show you where the treatment area covers.
- + Do not use any other products on the skin, unless recommended by radiation therapy staff. Some products may irritate the skin, so please ask us before using anything.
- + Pat the skin dry with a soft towel. Do not rub it.
- + Avoid spraying perfume or deodorant on the treatment area.

- + Wear loose comfortable clothing next to the skin, preferably natural fibres such as cotton.
- + Protect the skin from wind, sun and direct heat. A total sun block will be needed on the treated area hereafter.
- + Do not expose skin to hot water bottles, ice packs etc.
- + Do not rub or scratch the skin, as this will make the reaction worse.
- + It is important that you do not shave or wax under your arm on the treated side.

The radiation therapist will monitor your skin during the course of your treatment. If you are worried or are experiencing any discomfort please discuss it with us.

### Fatigue

Fatigue is another commonly experienced side effect of radiation therapy. It ranges from a mild loss of energy to an overwhelming "bone-tired" feeling that is not always relieved by rest. You may find that you feel more tired as the treatment progresses. These are some ideas that may help.

- + Rest as much as you feel that you need to.
- + Maintain a balanced diet.
- + Gentle exercise such as walking 2-3 times a week can help reduce fatigue.
- + Do the things that you enjoy and that make you feel good such as reading, visiting with friends or spending time outdoors.
- + While many people find they are able to carry on working, others may need time off.

You can continue to drive a car if you wish. Many patients are able to drive themselves throughout their treatment.

It may take a while after your treatment finishes before any tiredness you may have been experiencing gradually disappears.

### Stiffness

Sometimes, increased stiffness of the shoulder on the treated side occurs: it is important to see the physiotherapist should this arise. It is also important to continue the arm exercises shown to you after surgery.