

SOME ADVICE

Following these little advices taking care of your skin during radiation therapy will be possible:

Gentleness

☼ *The skin in the treated area must be rinsed with warm water, not too hot nor too cold, with gentle cleansers, avoiding abrasive sponges and be dried putting a warm cloth on the skin, without rubbing.*

☼ *We advice against frequent fomentation that can only provide temporary relief.*

☼ *Using perfumes, lotions and deodorants is contraindicated. They sometimes contain alcohol that might irritate the skin in this time, when it's more sensitive.*

☼ *We suggest to avoid homemade remedies (such as oil, eggs or other substances based emulsions): Radiotherapy Division staff will suggest to apply moisturizing and soothing creams on the irradiated area multiple times a day. They will recommend as well adequate products for the relief of persistent itchiness and erythemas.*

☼ *Please come to your radiation therapy session with clean skin, creams could be applied afterwards.*

☼ *In case of burst or serous secretion, the Radiation Oncologist and the Nurse will recommend you the right products to use and how to medicate. During the treatment, if necessary, it is possible to have access to the Division ambulatories.*

☼ *We recommend not to use band-aids on irradiated skin.*

Clothing

☼ *We recommend to choose comfortable, natural fabric made clothes, they facilitate skin transpiration: soft, undecorated bras are best (laces may compress and irritate the skin).*

Sun

Days at the seaside, the swimming pool or the mountainside are possible, remembering that irradiated skin is especially sensitive. We recommend to avoid direct sun exposure during treatment weeks and for a few months after its ending. Even after many months from the end to the therapy it is important to apply high protection sun block. Bathing at the sea or the pool is possible if bursts, desquamations or intense rashes are not present.

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RADIATION THERAPY IN BREAST CANCER

As for many other tumors, Radiotherapy plays an important role in the therapeutic path of breast cancer, integrating with surgery (conservative or mastectomy), and systemic therapies (chemotherapy and hormone therapy), with specific possibilities depending on the clinical situation.

Who will I meet?

The Radiation Oncologist is a specialized Physician who prescribes the radiation treatment, studying the best dose distribution in cooperation with the Physicists and following the therapy development.

The Physicist cooperates with Radiation Oncologists studying treatment plans.

The Radiotherapy Technician cooperates with the Radiation Oncologist in preliminary procedures (simulation, organs contouring) and is responsible for everyday treatments following the prescribed modalities.

The Nurse assists the patients during scheduled visits along the therapy and supports in case of side effects.

Administrative staff deals with administrative matters regarding patients in the waiting list or undergoing a treatment.

How does radiation therapy work?

CT-simulation is the first procedure necessary for treatment planning. It's a short, not painful procedure, without a diagnostic purpose, which allows identifying volumes that will be treated during the radiation therapy and zones that need to be protected. Physicists and Radiation Oncologists develop a **personalized treatment plan** (irradiation field's geometry, dose to be delivered and overall therapy duration).

During the subsequent **simulation** all data referring to the treatment plan will be verified with the patient and radiological digital imaging will be acquired.

To replicate daily the field matches, **punctiform permanent India ink tattoos** will be marked with

a thin needle: then skin may be washed without worrying about deleting these important marks.

During radiotherapy sessions, the Technician will help the patient to settle in the right position on the bed.

The position must be held for the time the treatment will take, generally a few minutes.

The patient is always kept under control by a closed-circuit audio video system, thanks to which she will be able to communicate, if necessary, with the Technicians sitting at machines control desks. Radiation therapy is painless. There is no need to be accompanied or to stay in the clinic after the session.

Radiation treatment will be performed on week-

days and the overall duration of the therapy may vary from 3 to 6 weeks.

It is possible to keep usual lifestyle: people can keep working, taking care of family and children and take part to social activities. Patients would never be radioactive and can spend time with children and people of all ages without any fear.

During treatment time, the patient will be visited on a regular basis to check her tolerance to the cure: the Physician and the Nurse will possibly suggest support treatments.

A Radiation Oncologist is always available in the Division during machines working times; patients can address him/her at any time for issues related to the radiation treatment.

RADIATION THERAPY SIDE EFFECTS

Radiotherapy can induce moderate general side effects: a distress feeling may last for some time. The advice is to rest and seek help if feeling tired. Pharmacologic help for energies recovery is not necessarily needed.

Inflammatory reactions may show on the irradiated skin with transitory redness and irritation similar to sunburn.

Irradiated skin reactions are gradual and subjective: during the third/fourth week of treatment, not flawless or dry and itchy areas may appear, especially under the breast and/or close to the armpits. Sometimes the skin becomes darker and drier.

In the irradiated mammary area a mild swelling and temporary soreness may appear.

These effects disappear spontaneously within a few weeks from the end of radiotherapy and the treatment result is satisfactory for most patients.

In some cases, after some time, late side effects may show. Breast may stay harder or slightly change its shape, the skin may appear less elastic and little superficial capillaries may become evident.

Thanks to the dosimetric planning and irradiation techniques accuracy, side effects to healthy organs are rare.