

SIDE EFFECTS OF BREAST CANCER TREATMENT



Intermountain[®]
Cancer Centers

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Radiation therapy for breast cancer causes side effects. A side effect is a negative or unwanted reaction to treatment. Side effects come on slowly, usually starting about 3 weeks into treatment, and last for a few weeks after radiation therapy ends. They usually get better once radiation therapy is complete.

COMMON SIDE EFFECTS



Skin reaction: Your skin's reaction may look similar to a sunburn and its color may vary from red to a mild-to-moderate pink. It may itch, burn, feel sore, or peel. Your skin might have a more dramatic reaction to radiation if you have large breasts, are receiving radiation after a mastectomy, or have recently had chemotherapy. It is not recommended to wear a bra during radiation treatment. Some areas of your skin may react more than others:

- Areas that have received a lot of sun exposure may take longer to heal.
- The skin in your armpit tends to get more red or irritated than other areas because the arm rubs back and forth against the radiated skin.
- The skin in the fold under your breast may become red or irritated because moisture can get trapped and most bras rub this area.

Ask your care team for the *Skin Irritation* handout.



Swelling in the breast: You may notice swelling of the breast. The swelling is not usually painful but may take several months to go away.



Fatigue (extreme tiredness): The most effective way to prevent and treat fatigue is through exercise. It is important to keep moving and get at least 30 minutes of exercise a day. Eating healthy and drinking plenty of water also help prevent fatigue.

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