

You may notice that your skin becomes more sensitive or sore during the first 2 weeks after your last treatment. This will improve gradually. Some permanent changes to the skin are quite common; you may find that the breast tissue becomes firmer and less stretchy, with thin red lines due to tiny broken blood vessels. If you receive radiation therapy to the remaining breast, you may find that the breast tissue becomes harder. The skin will continue to be more sensitive and may be sunburned more easily than before, high factor sunscreen is recommended.

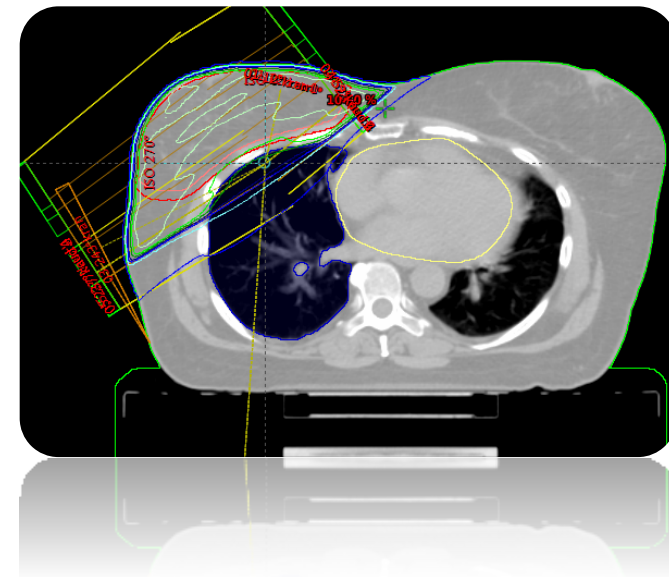
SORE THROAT

If your airways and oesophagus are included in the radiation target area, the mucus membranes (lining of the throat) may become irritated. This can cause the throat to be sore and you may experience some difficulty swallowing. Avoid foods that may irritate your throat, such as highly spiced, salty, acidic or very hot foods and drinks.

If you experience side effects or have other questions related to your treatment, you are always welcome to ask the radiotherapy staff. You can also address these issues with your doctor during your scheduled appointments.

Haukeland Universitetssjukehus
Avdeling for kreftbehandling og medisinsk fysikk
www.helse-bergen.no/avd/kreftavdelinga
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Radiation therapy to the breast/chest wall/armpit



Treatment

Each treatment session lasts for 10 to 25 minutes. The actual radiation only lasts for one to five minutes. You will receive treatment every day, except weekends and public holidays. During the treatment period, the staff will use the treatment machine to take a special type of x-ray images. These images are not used to evaluate the effect of the treatment, but they are an important quality control to ensure that the treatment remains on target.

Follow-up during treatment

During the course of treatment, you will be required to take blood samples at regular intervals. You will also be scheduled for doctor's appointments in the outpatient's clinic (Kreft Poliklinikk). During your appointments with the doctor, you can address any questions you may have regarding your illness and the treatment. If you need prescriptions or a sick leave certificate, please request this during your doctor's appointment. It can be useful to make a list of questions for the doctor prior to the appointment.

Smoking

Research shows that smoking during radiotherapy reduces the effect of the radiation on the tumour. This is probably connected with the fact that the effect of radiotherapy depends on the access to oxygen in the tissue. Smoking limits oxygenation of the tumour tissue, it is therefore important that you abstain from smoking during the weeks you are undergoing radiotherapy. If you need further information on smoking and radiotherapy, we recommend that you address this issue with your doctor.

Side effects from radiotherapy

Radiotherapy can cause side effects. Side effects often become apparent one to two weeks into the treatment and will generally subside two to three weeks after completing the radiotherapy.

Common side effects are:

FATIGUE

Radiotherapy can make you feel faint and tired. Get plenty of rest and fresh air during treatment, and go for walks outside when possible.

SKIN REACTIONS

There is a possibility that the surface of your skin will become irritated. Signs of redness, tenderness or itching can appear. During the treatment period we recommend that you wash the radiated area with a mild, non-perfumed soap. Avoid taking baths, and use the shower instead. Do not rub radiated skin, but gently pat the skin dry with a soft towel. Deodorant without perfume may be used as long as your skin is not irritated.

If your skin becomes red and tender, you may use a recommended lotion. Apply the lotion to radiated skin after each treatment. Avoid clothes that are tight-fitting, and try to use soft cotton clothes. Damaged skin should be exposed to air, but protected from the sun; use a sunscreen with a high sun protection factor on areas of the skin not covered by clothes.