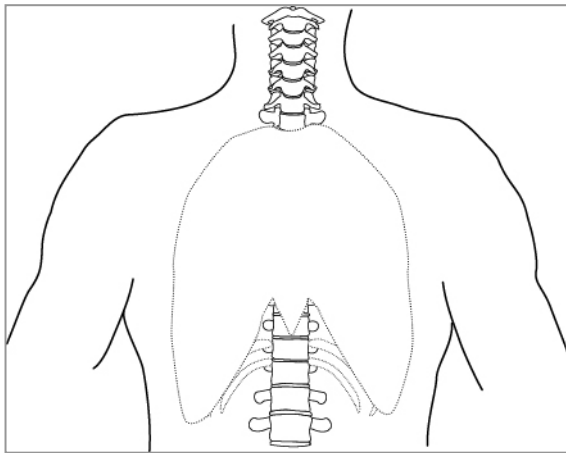


Radiation Therapy to the Central Chest

You will be getting radiation to the central chest area. Some of the common side effects include skin irritation, dry or sore throat, problems swallowing, fatigue, and nausea. Side effects can begin roughly 2 – 3 weeks after the start of treatments. They can last for 2 – 4 weeks after the end of treatment. Some side effects may occur at different times. Not everyone has side effects.



Your Treatment

Right before your treatment, we will ask you to get into position on a treatment table. The radiation therapists will help you get into the correct position. Some patients are put into “molds.” These molds are made during the treatment planning process.

You may also have tiny dots put on your skin. These marks relate to your treatment field. They look like tiny freckles and will not be easy to see. We may have used markers to make these marks.

If these marks fade, we will remark them. After your radiation treatment is finished, you can allow the marks to fade. You can also gently remove them using soap and water or baby oil. These marks may rub off on your clothes. If this happens, spray the

stains with hair spray or Spray'N'Wash® before you wash your clothes.

Radiation Skin Reaction

Most radiation goes through the skin into body tissues. The skin in treatment sites can become reddened, irritated or dry and itchy. Sometimes, the skin will peel and become moist. This happens most often in skin folds and curves. The radiation therapists will tell you which sites to watch.

Watch your skin closely and report any changes. Use the skin care products as directed. We will watch your skin reaction closely. We may tell you to change the way you care for your skin. Some skin reactions can be painful. Tylenol® or ibuprofen often helps. If you need something stronger or help with skin care, let us know.

Skin Care During Treatment

To protect your skin during treatment, follow these skin care guidelines. Follow these guidelines before, during and after your treatment, until your skin has fully healed.

Skin Care Guidelines

You may bathe or shower like normal using lukewarm water. If you need soap, use one that is meant for dry or sensitive skin. Some mild soaps include: Aveeno®, Dove®, Basis®, Neutrogena®, Cetaphil® and Ivory®. Rinse skin well and gently pat dry. Do not rub the skin in treatment fields.

Avoid heat—heating pads, very hot water in the bath or shower, and hot water bottles.

Avoid cold. Do not expose the skin to ice or very cold water or air.

Avoid sunlight or sunlamps on the skin in the treatment site. When you are outside, keep the area covered with clothing. If clothing does not cover the area, use a sunscreen with SPF of 30 or higher.

Avoid rubbing or using friction on the treated skin. Do not rub or scrub the treated area. Wear comfortable, loose, cotton-based clothing that will allow good air flow. Avoid clothing made of nylon or synthetics because they hold moisture next to the skin. Clothes that bind can irritate the skin more.

Avoid using tape on skin in the treated area.

In most cases, nothing should be applied to the treated skin unless approved by your doctor or nurse. This includes bath oils, perfumes, talcum powders, and lotions. If a skin reaction is expected, we will suggest a skin moisturizer. Use it each day.

Remember: Your skin needs to be clean and dry before each treatment. You can apply lotions and creams 2 – 4 times per day to help your skin feel better. You should not apply lotions or creams in the 1 – 2 hours before your treatment. If your treatment is later in the day, you may apply a skin care product before your treatment if it will be fully absorbed by treatment time.

Skin Care After Treatment

Although rare, late effects may occur. These late effects may occur months to years after the end of treatment. Treated skin may stay dry. It may also darken in color or become firm and tough. It may help to apply skin moisturizer or vitamin E oil.

The skin in treatment areas may always be extra sensitive to sunlight. When outdoors, use a sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher on treated skin exposed to the sun. Treated skin is at a higher risk for a certain type of skin cancer.

Dry or Sore Throat

Sometimes a dry or sore throat can occur with radiation to the chest. Listed below are some things that you can do to help this side effect.

- Use a vaporizer in your living room or in your bedroom at night when you sleep.
- Avoid smoking and chewing tobacco.
- Drink plenty of liquids—8 to 10 glasses each day.
- Suck on hard candies, mints, or throat lozenges.
- Avoid alcohol, hot foods, acidic foods and juices (orange, lemon, lime, or grapefruit) and spicy foods.
- Your doctor may prescribe a numbing spray or liquid, if needed.

Feeling Tired

Feeling tired (fatigue) during radiation treatment is a common side effect. Fatigue does not mean that your tumor is getting worse. Some people feel no fatigue and can keep up with their normal routines. Others feel the need to take an extra nap each day. Still, others change their routines, working only part time, for example. Some people don't do anything that requires a large amount of energy.

Fatigue can begin right away, or it can occur after 1 – 2 weeks of treatment. It can go on for several weeks to months after treatment has ended. Rarely, it can last for up to a year.

Low blood counts may also cause you to feel tired. Your bone marrow makes blood cells. If a lot of bone is in your radiation field, your production of blood cells may be slowed down for a time. This is a short-term side effect. Your doctor may order blood tests to check your blood cell counts throughout treatment.

Tips for Dealing with Fatigue

Listen to your body and rest when you need to. A short nap during the day or sleeping a little longer may help.

Make time for things you enjoy. Take a walk in the fresh air, visit with a friend, or pursue a hobby during the times that you have the most energy. Do things that help you feel good.

Stop smoking and limit alcohol use. Do something healthy for yourself. If you need help with this, talk with your doctor or nurse. There are ways we can help.

If you work, you may want to keep working. Some people can maintain a full-time job. Others find it helpful to work fewer hours. Many employers understand and will agree to part-time work. We can schedule your treatment times to fit in with your work schedule.

Plan regular active exercise – daily walks, riding an exercise bike, or any mild exercise. Go at your own pace. **Never** exercise to the point of fatigue. You should feel less tired after the exercise than you did before the exercise.

Find ways to deal with your emotions. Pent-up emotions can add to fatigue. Talk with family or friends. Having a good cry or laugh can be helpful.

Eat well. Keep foods around that need little effort to prepare – cheese, yogurt, or slices of meat. When you feel well, prepare and freeze meals to eat later when you are tired. You need extra calories and protein to maintain energy while getting treatments. They also help repair normal skin cells damaged by your treatment. Speak with a clinic nurse if you have problems eating.

Drink 8 to 12 glasses of fluid per day. The water will help to flush some of the by-products of your cancer fighting treatment out of your body.

If you need help with your basic daily needs, ask your nurse or the social worker to help you contact your local resources. You may be able to receive help with meals, housekeeping, personal care, transportation, support groups, and respite care.

Accept help from family and friends. If they ask you to call if you need anything, they may need specific ideas from you. Often people want to help but don't know what things you need the most help doing. Things like mowing the lawn, cooking or watching the kids, can help both you and your friends to feel good.

Visits from family and friends can be pleasant, but also tiring. You do not need to be the perfect host or hostess. Let your friends and family fix dinner and get the drinks and snacks for you!

Some people may have pain from cancer or other causes. Pain can be very tiring. Your doctor and nurse can work with you to achieve good pain control. Let them know about any pain you have during treatment.

Nausea

Radiation to the central chest can cause nausea and vomiting. Some patients reduce their intake or stop eating to avoid these symptoms. We do not suggest you do this. Your body needs food to heal and rebuild normal tissue. Food also provides energy and strength to help you complete your treatments. Tell your doctor or nurse if you have nausea or vomiting. Often, these symptoms can be controlled.

Tips to Help with Nausea

- Eat small amounts of salty foods such as crackers or pretzels.
- Drink small amounts of clear, cold drinks such as 7-Up®, ginger ale, and caffeine-free cola. Avoid drinking large amounts as this can cause gas. Do not drink carbonated drinks if you have esophagitis (irritation of your esophagus).
- Try cold foods such as popsicles, gelatin desserts, yogurt, cottage cheese, cheese, deviled eggs, and cold meats.
- Relax, eat slowly, and chew your food well. Doing this will help you digest your food more easily. Eat small meals (4-6 per day).
- Avoid eating 1-2 hours before and after treatment.

Problems with Swallowing

You can have problems with swallowing when the esophagus is in the treatment field. Some patients notice burning or fullness in the throat. Other patients may notice a problem only when they swallow. This problem can begin two weeks after starting treatment and can last for two to four weeks after the treatments end.

Tips to Help with Swallowing Problems

- Relax, eat slowly, and chew your food well. Eat small meals (4-6 per day).
- Eat cool, soft, moist or wet foods.
- Drink 8 – 12 glasses of fluid each day.
- Antacids can coat and protect the esophagus. Ask your doctor if it is okay to use before meals.
- Sometimes you need pain medicine. If pain is keeping you from eating or drinking, talk with your doctor.

Other Concerns

Being diagnosed with cancer affects many areas of your life. Patients feel its impact on their emotions, marriage, family, jobs, and finances, your thoughts and feelings about the future, and many other important areas of life. The nurses and social workers can help you cope with these issues. They can suggest support services and resources. Feel free to speak to them at any time.

Cancer Resource Services

Gilda's Club offers support and education, in a warm welcoming place. It is free support for everyone living with cancer. Call **608-828-8880** or email program@gildasclubmadison.org.

Cancer Information Service is a phone service of the National Cancer Institute. It is a resource for local cancer care as well as cancer care around the country. The toll-free number is **1-800-422-6237**.

Who to Call

If you have questions or concerns after your treatments end, call the Radiotherapy Clinic (open 8 am–5 pm) at **(608) 263-8500**. Ask to speak to a nurse. If the clinic is closed, your call will be transferred to the paging operator. Give your name and number with the area code. A doctor will call you back.

Eating Tips

	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
Drinks	Milk products, milkshakes, eggnog; pear, apple, prune, grape or cranapple juice; water-diluted citrus juices; Kool-Aid®; Carnation Instant Breakfast® or other nutritional supplements.	Alcohol; full strength citrus juices; carbonated drinks; very hot or cold drinks.
Breakfast Foods	Milk toast; soft-cooked or poached eggs; diced, moist meats; hot cereals cooked with milk.	Dry cereals, dry toast, and granola.
Main and Side Dishes	Tender, moist, cooked meats - grind or blend meats with gravies and sauces, if needed; moist casseroles; rice or noodles with gravy or sauce; macaroni and cheese; mashed potatoes; baby food; creamed soups; soft, cooked vegetables; moist baked beans.	Highly seasoned or spicy dishes; chewy, dry, tough meat or poultry; fried foods; undercooked vegetables
Snack Foods	Slices of cheese or cheese spread; sliced bananas; cooked fruit; graham crackers soaked in milk; peanut butter on soft bread.	Dry crackers; nuts; potato chips; raw fruit or vegetables; hard bread; rough textured foods; spicy dips.
Desserts	Pudding; ice cream; gelatin; custard; tapioca; yogurt; Fudgesicles®; popsicles.	Any crumbly, dry, chewy dessert.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4554