

# How to Manage Swelling in Your Breast or Arm During Radiation Therapy

## Radiation Therapy

You are having radiation therapy to treat cancer in your breast area. Radiation therapy uses high-energy radiation (X-rays) to shrink or destroy the tumor. During this treatment you may have swelling (edema) in your breast or arm.

It is important that you take special care of the breast or arm on the side of your body you are having radiation. The following guidelines will help you manage swelling in your breast or arm.

## Hygiene

- Wash your breast and arm with lukewarm water and a gentle soap or no soap every day. Make sure shower or bath water is not hot enough to cause your skin to turn red. This can increase swelling. Pat dry gently. Do not rub.
- You may use deodorant or antiperspirant, unless you develop redness and/or dryness in your armpit area. Please ask your health care provider if you have specific concerns about the use of these products.
- Use an electric razor for shaving under your arm.
- Use moisturizers with no perfumes or dyes every day. Your health care provider can help you decide which type of moisturizer is right for you and when you should put it on.

## Your Health Care Provider

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Discomfort

- You may take acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) for the discomfort. Ask your health care provider if it is OK to take ibuprofen (such as Advil®).
- Elevate (raise) the swollen area (breast or arm). Lie down on your side or back and support the swollen area with a small pillow or a rolled towel. Use a cold pack to help relieve discomfort as needed.
- For breast swelling, wear a supportive bra without underwires. Choose a loose, sports bra or a bra that is made out of soft cotton fabric that doesn't rub in your armpit area.

Sports bras with a wide chest band and wide shoulder straps will help relieve pressure and are more comfortable. For women with larger busts, choose a sports bra that does not flatten the breasts and has some support.

*(over)*

## Activity

- Avoid repetitive movements of the shoulder and chest wall (raking, vacuuming, scrubbing, pushing or pulling).
- Avoid activities that can cause bumping or pushing on the chest wall (carrying heavy packages or groceries, heavy sports that involve the upper chest and arms).
- Exercise is important to help reduce swelling in the arm and chest. Good exercise choices include walking, swimming, light aerobics, bicycle riding, stretching, tai chi, some kinds of yoga (no downward facing dog or downdog) and deep breathing.
- Do gentle shoulder range of motion (ROM) exercises for the shoulder. These types of exercises move your joints and improve your flexibility. Your health care provider will show you how to do ROM exercises.

If you have questions or concerns about your health, talk with your health care provider.