

Radiation Therapy Basics

Always consult with your naturopathic doctor to ensure that all herbs, vitamins, and other supplements you are taking are safe with your current conventional treatment plan.



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- **4 hours BEFORE radiation - do not apply anything topically** to the skin area that is being treated.
- AFTER radiation: clean the skin and apply recommended cream (see below).
- Avoid shaving or using hair removal products on the treated area. If you must, use an electric razor.
- Avoid harsh soaps on the skin when showering and use warm water instead of hot.
- Do not go swimming during treatment as chlorine used in swimming pools can be irritating to the skin.
- Avoid exposing the treatment area to direct sunlight. Keep area covered if you are unable to avoid sun.

Potential Side Effects

- Fatigue or low energy
 - Movement, for example walking, for 20-30 minutes per day, has been studied and shown to help reduce the fatigue associated with radiation therapy and improve energy. Exercise also improves oxygenation of tissues, which may improve the efficacy of radiation therapy.
- Skin changes and sensitivity (see below)
 - Your skin might become more sensitive, or you may notice redness, darkening, burning, dryness, or cracking. In rare cases, some patients experience blisters or the skin breaking open.
- Other side effects are specific to the area being treated, for example:
 - If the radiation field includes some of the throat, you can experience some heartburn or difficulty or painful swallowing.
 - When radiation is directed at the pelvis such as in the treatment of prostate, rectal and some gynecological cancers, you may experience diarrhea or painful urination.
 - When radiation is directed to the whole brain or to the mid-section, you may experience nausea.
 - Your naturopathic doctor can recommend specific support for these side effects during your visit

For Skin Inflammation and Irritation

- Continue washing as normal using a non-perfumed soaps or soaps designed for sensitive skin
- Pat your skin dry, avoiding friction as much as possible
- Your naturopathic doctor will recommend one or more of the following: Aveeno colloidal oatmeal cream, Boiron calendula cream, Unda 270 cream or Medihoney gel.
 - You can apply it up to three times a day: in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night. Wash your skin gently to remove old cream before you reapply it. A little bit goes a long way, so use just a thin layer of cream. Be careful not to put cream on any non-permanent marks your radiation therapist might have made on your skin since it might cause them to rub off.

Other Supportive Ideas:

- Visualization or guided imagery during treatment can help reduce anxiety. If you are not comfortable with this or need help determining a good visualization, let your naturopathic doctor know.
- Your blood counts can drop during radiation treatment, so try adding blood-building foods, like bone broths, dark leafy greens, organic/naturally-raised and fed meats to your diet.
- There are some nutrients that have been studied during radiation therapy to improve outcomes – your naturopathic doctor will recommend these individually

When Your Radiation Treatment is Completed:

- For 2 weeks following your treatment, continue washing the skin in the treatment area with mild soap, and gently patting it dry. If your skin is dry and irritated, you can use a small amount of lotion as long as the skin is not broken. If your reaction to the radiation gets worse, stop using all soaps and lotions and contact your naturopathic doctor and radiation nurse. If the radiation therapist made non-permanent marks on your skin, you can now wash them off.