

# Treating breast cancer with radiotherapy



This health sheet explains:

- How to prepare for your treatments
- How to take care of yourself during the treatments
- Possible side effects

For general information on radiotherapy, see the health sheet [Your radiation oncology care pathway](#).

## How should I prepare BEFORE the treatment?

- During the treatment, your arms will be positioned above your head. It's recommended that you do exercises to improve your flexibility, which will make the position more comfortable. The exercises are described in the Appendix on pages 4 to 7.



An example of a device to keep the arms raised.

**Caution!** Radiation therapy will make your tissues less supple. It's important to continue exercising after the end of the treatments to keep your tissues supple and prevent pain when you move. You can continue doing them for the rest of your life, or at least until you no longer feel any tightness during the exercises.

- Buy in advance:
  - a mild, unscented soap (such as Dove)
  - an unscented moisturizing cream (such as Glaxal Base, Lubriderm, Uriage Xémose, Cutibase)

## How should I look after myself DURING the treatments?

### DIET

Eat a balanced, varied diet. Follow the advice in Canada's Food Guide.

### SUPPLEMENTS AND OTHER PRODUCTS

Don't take antioxidant supplements or any natural health products without consulting your physician.



## SKIN

- Apply moisturizing cream to the treated area twice a day for the duration of your treatments. Apply a thin layer. Don't leave any cream residue on the skin. Don't apply cream within 4 hours of a treatment.



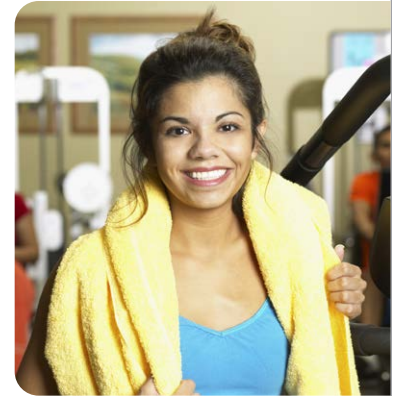
- Cover the treated area with clothing to protect it from the sun. Don't put sunscreen on this area.
- Wash the treated area with mild, unscented soap. After rinsing your skin, gently blot it dry. Don't rub.
- Don't use any products on the treated area without consulting your doctor.
- Don't run water that is too hot or too cold over the treated area.
- Don't shave your armpit on the side of the treated breast.



- Don't use deodorant on the side of the treated breast.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing. This reduces the risk of irritation to the treated area. Wear a large bra without underwires.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- You can continue doing your physical activities, but don't push yourself too hard. Also, avoid carrying weights heavier than 2.5 kg. That's about the equivalent of 2 one-and-a-half-liter bottles of soda.
- Don't swim in chlorinated or salt water.
- Don't go to saunas, spas, or steam rooms.
- Don't get an upper body massage, and don't undergo osteopathic treatment of this area of the body.



## PREGNANCY

- If you are of child-bearing age, take the necessary precautions to avoid becoming pregnant. Do so for the duration of treatment.

## What are the possible side effects?

You may experience the following side effects:

- mild to moderate fatigue



- redness, more sensitive skin, or slight swelling of the skin in the treated area
- discomfort in your shoulders and neck due to your arms being positioned above your head

Who can I call for help or to ask questions?

You can call your clinical coordinator.  
Outside of business hours, for any health concern related to your radiotherapy, you can call the CHUM Patient Health Line.



CHUM PATIENT HEALTH LINE

**514 890-8086**  
**24 hours a day, 7 days a week**  
You're a CHUM patient? You have questions about your health status? A nurse can help you.



Questions




Resource people and contacts




USEFUL RESOURCES

Canada's food guide  
[food-guide.canada.ca](http://food-guide.canada.ca)

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online.  
[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

*The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.*

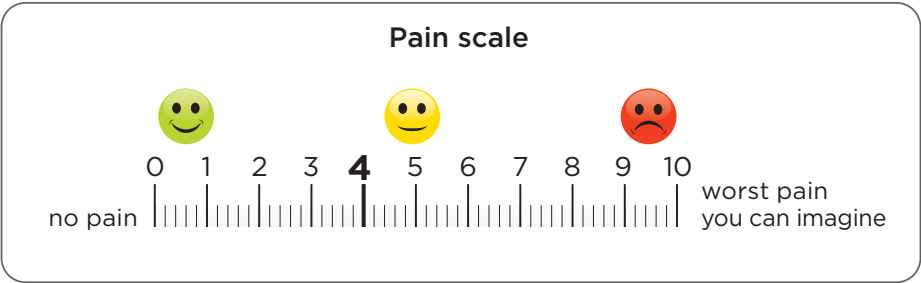
To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
[chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)



APPENDIX: EXERCICES TO PREPARE FOR TREATMENT

Do the exercise sequence 1 to 3 times a day. Repeat each exercise 10 times.

If you feel pain, you need do the exercises anyway. On a scale of 0 to 10, rate your pain before exercising. If it's more than 4, take painkillers 30 to 60 minutes before doing the exercises. This will be more comfortable for you.

**Reminder: Start doing the exercises now, before your radiotherapy sessions. Continue to do them after the treatments are over for as long as you feel any tightness while doing them.**



Shoulder circles	
Starting position	Action
 <p>Standing, hands on shoulders.</p>	 <p>Make backwards circles with your elbows. If you have a drain, don't lift your elbows above shoulder height.</p>



## Shoulder abduction

### Starting position



Lying on your back, knees bent.  
Arm by your side, palm facing up.

### Action



Try to raise your arm as high as possible while sliding your arm on the bed. Keep your palm facing the ceiling and your elbow straight. Hold this position for 5 seconds.

## Shoulder flexion with a stick

### Starting position





Lying on your back, knees bent.  
A stick in your hands, shoulder-width apart.

### Action



Lift the stick above your head as far as you can. If you have a drain, don't go beyond shoulder height. Don't bend your elbows or arch your back. Hold the position for 5 seconds and then come back down.

## Pectoral stretch 1 — Don't do this if you have a drain

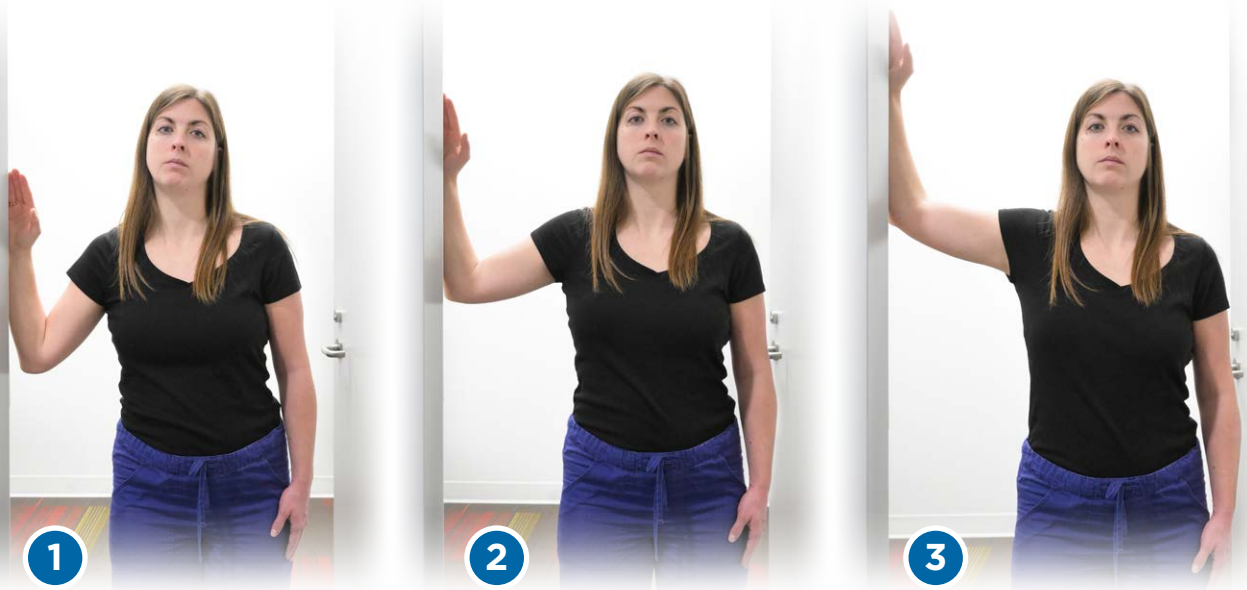
Starting position	Action
 <p>Lying on your back, a folded towel under your head, knees bent, or sitting with your back supported.</p> <p>Hands together at the nape of your neck, elbows touching in front of you.</p>	 <p>Move your elbows towards the back of your neck until you feel a stretch in your upper chest and shoulders. Hold for 10-20 seconds. Then return to the starting position.</p>

## Pectoral stretch 2 — Don't do this if you have a drain

Starting position	Action
 <p>Lying on your back, a folded towel under your head, knees bent, arms crossed.</p>	 <p>Inhale and then exhale as you lower your knees to the side opposite the operated side. At the same time, turn your head towards the operated side. Hold the position for 3 deep breaths. Then return to the starting position.</p> <p>Repeat 5 times.</p>

### Pectoral stretch 3 — Don't do this if you have a drain

#### Starting position



Standing in a doorway, the arm of the affected side facing upwards, resting against one side of the doorframe. Do the exercise with the arm below shoulder height (photo ①). Then repeat with arm at shoulder height (photo ②) and above shoulder height (photo ③).

#### Action



Lean forward and rotate slightly until you feel a stretch along your chest and the front of your arm. Hold for 20 seconds.



## Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.






## Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important: your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.






## Upcoming appointments
