



# Radiotherapy for Breast cancer





# Contact Information

## Units in our group

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Visit us online at [www.cancersa.co.za](http://www.cancersa.co.za)

Treatment can be provided at any of the above locations, by the same Doctors within our group, whichever location may be more convenient to you.

Any appointment related enquiries can be made on the above numbers. In Pretoria, our administration teams are available from 08:00 until 16:30 and in Johannesburg our administration teams are available from 08:00 to 17:00.

**In case of a medical emergency outside of the above listed hours, contact our Oncologist on call at:**

If you are on treatment in Pretoria, please call: **(+27) 82 373 2148**

If you are on treatment in Johannesburg, please call: **(+27) 82 307 5565**

# What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy uses controlled high energy x-rays to treat tumours and other diseases of the body. Radiation works by damaging the DNA of cells preventing them to divide and reproduce. Abnormal cancer cells are more sensitive to radiation because they divide more quickly than normal cells. Over time, the abnormal cells die, and the tumour shrinks. Normal cells can also be damaged by radiation, but they can repair themselves more effectively.

The goal of radiation therapy is to maximize the dose to abnormal cells while minimizing exposure to normal cells. The effects of radiation are not immediate; the treatment benefit occurs over time.

Radiation therapy is painless and will not make you radioactive.

Radiation is often given with the intent of destroying the tumour and curing the disease (curative treatment). However, not all disease or cancer can be cured with radiation. Sometimes radiation is used to relieve symptoms, such as pain (palliative treatment).

Radiation therapy is delivered with a linear accelerator (LINAC) as shown in the picture below.



# What happens next?

After the planning scan is done the pre-treatment process must follow. This is a multi-disciplinary process and can take up to several working days to ensure that optimal and precise treatment is given.

This is a timeous process so please be patient.

Once all these processes are completed you will receive a phone call with your first treatment date and time.

Appointment times are subjected to availability, but we will try to accommodate you to the best of our abilities.

If you are late for your appointment, please understand that we are working according to a schedule and will treat patients that are on time first. You will be attended to as soon as an opening is available.

On the first day of treatment you will receive a schedule with **all** your treatment appointments. Please be here 10 minutes before the scheduled time.

The radiotherapists assess you every day on which you receive treatment, so please tell them if you have any difficulties or queries. They can offer you considerable advice.

During your course of treatment, you will see your radiation oncologist once a week. If he/she is not available for any reason one of the other doctors in the practice can see you if necessary.

During your first week of treatment you will also see our counsellor for a **free** counselling session. We encourage every patient to make use of this service. Battling cancer is tough. It may help to join a support group and seek out help from family or friends.

After your treatment is completed you must make a 2 week follow up appointment with your radiation oncologist. This is still part of the treatment and will not have any extra charges.

# Possible side effects

All patients differ, so please do not compare yourself to others.

During your treatment you may experience dryness, itchiness or soreness of the skin. You should try the following advice from the start of your treatment until 2 weeks after the radiotherapy is completed.

- ❖ You can gently wash the treatment area with plain dove soap without rubbing it vigorously or using too hot water. Pat the skin dry with a soft towel.
- ❖ Do not use any other products (lotions, gels, creams) unless advised by the radiotherapists or doctor, as they may irritate the skin.
- ❖ Maizena (corn starch) can be used as a powder on the area to lessen friction.
- ❖ Aqueous cream (no colourants or scents) may be used on treatment area.
- ❖ Wear comfortable clothes and good breast support. Sports bras or bras with wide elasticised band are often more comfortable than light weight bras and under wired bras.
- ❖ Pure dove roll-on deodorant can be used on the affected side's underarm.

- ❖ No shaving of the underarm on treatment side.
- ❖ Protect the skin being treated from sun exposure throughout radiotherapy. Do not apply sunscreen on treated skin.
- ❖ Advise your doctor about any medications or vitamins you are taking, to make sure they are safe to use during radiotherapy.

Please follow these guidelines to ensure as little as possible external skin irritation during treatment and 2 weeks **after** treatment.

During your treatment you can continue eating, drinking and exercising as normal.

# Arm exercises

For treatment you will be required to lie with the affected side's arm above your head. This can be difficult for some patients after their surgery.

We do have a specialized physiotherapist's number if you wish to book a consultation with her.

## Below are some exercises that can help:

You can do these exercises 5-10 reps, 2x per day.

You will need to start gradually and slowly so that you don't strain your arm.

**Lifting your arm above your head** – Lie on your back and hold your arm on the side you had the operation with your other hand. Gently lift your arms as far as you can above your head. When you can do this easily, do it sitting in a chair.



**Walking your fingers up the wall** – Stand facing a wall and walk your fingers up slowly. You may feel tightness, but it should not be painful. When you feel tightness, stop for a few seconds and if it subsides, try to go slightly higher.



**Walk your fingers up the wall sideways** – Stand with the side you had the operation next to the wall. Walk your fingers up the wall so that the palm of your hand is facing the wall.

