Radiation Therapy
To the Arms or Legs

You will be receiving two to six weeks of radiation to the arms or legs. It will describe how your treatments are given. It will also describe how to take care of yourself. Common side effects from radiation to the arms and/or legs include skin irritation and fatigue. These side effects can begin about two weeks after the start of treatment. They can last for two to four weeks after the treatments end. Some side effects may occur at different times. Not everyone has side effects.

Positioning for Your Treatment
Each day, right before your treatment, you will be asked 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 period.

Tiny dots or marks may also have been put on your skin. These marks relate to your treatment field. They look like tiny freckles and will not be easy to see. Oil based skin markers or a dye may be used to make these marks.

If these marks fade, they will be remarked. After your radiation therapy 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. Even so, the skin in the treatment sites can become reddened and irritated. It can also become 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 you notice. Use the skin care products as directed. As your skin reaction develops, we will also watch it closely. We may tell you to change the way you care for your skin. Some skin reactions can be painful. Tylenol® or ibuprofen is usually helpful. If you need something stronger or help with skin care, let us know.

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

**Skin Care during Treatment**
In order to protect your skin during treatment, you should follow the guidelines listed below. You will need to follow these guidelines during your treatment and afterwards, until your skin has fully healed.

**Remember: Your skin needs to be clean and dry before each treatment. Lotions and creams should be applied 2–4 times per day to help your skin feel better. You should not apply lotions or creams in the 1-2 hour period 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 the time your treatment is given.**

1. You may bathe or shower as usual using lukewarm water. If you need soap, use one that is meant for dry or sensitive skin. Rinse skin well and gently pat it completely dry. Do not rub.

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

3. Avoid cold. Do not allow the skin to become chilled from exposure to ice or very cold water or air.

4. 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 completely cover the area, use a sunscreen with SPF of 30 or higher.

5. Avoid rubbing or using friction on the skin exposed to treatment. 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 cause further irritation to the radiated skin.
6. Avoid the use of tape on skin in the treated area.

7. In most cases, nothing should be applied to the treated skin unless approved of 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 as instructed.

**Skin Care after Treatment**

1. Although rare, late side effects from radiation can occur. These “late effects” develop months to years after the completion of treatment. Treated skin may continue to be dry. It may also darken in color, or become firm and tough. It may help to apply skin moisturizer or Vitamin E oil.

2. Skin in treatment sites may always be extra sensitive to sunlight. When outdoors, use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher on treated skin exposed to the sun. This is because the skin in treatment fields is at higher risk for a certain type of skin cancer.

**Feeling Tired**

Feeling tired (fatigue) during radiation treatment is a common side effect. The severity of fatigue varies from person to person. Fatigue does not mean that your tumor is getting worse. Some people feel no fatigue and are able to 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 a blood test from time to time to check your blood cell counts.

Here are a few tips that may help with feeling tired.

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

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

3. Stop smoking and do not drink alcohol to excess. Do something healthy for yourself. If you need help with this, talk with your doctor or nurse. There are ways we can help.

4. If you work you may want to keep working. Some people are able to 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.
5. 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. A good rule of thumb is that you should feel less tired after the exercise than you did before the exercise.

6. Take advantage of emotional outlets. Pent-up emotions can add to fatigue. Talk with family or friends. Having a good cry or laugh can be helpful.

7. 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. Extra calories and protein are needed 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.

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

9. 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.

10. Accept offers of help from family and friends. If friends ask if they can help, accept it! 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, baking a casserole or watching the kids, can help both you and your friends to feel good.

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

12. 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 discomfort you have during treatment.

**Other Concerns**
A diagnosis of cancer brings concerns other than the need to manage the acute side effects of treatment. Often, it affects many other areas of your life. Patients feel its impact on their emotions, marriage, family, jobs, finances, 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 them at any time.
Cancer Resource Services

There are many resources for cancer patients and their families.

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

**Cancer Information Service** is a nationwide telephone service of the National Cancer Institute. It has information about local cancer care as well as care available in other parts of the United States. The toll-free number is **1-800-4-CANCER** or **1-800-422-6237**.