Radiation Treatment Overview- Breast or Chest Wall and Nodes

During treatment, side effects MAY include:

Common:

- Red, warm and dry skin with some short-term blistering and peeling
- Swelling, tenderness, or tightness in the breast or chest wall
- Fatigue

Less Common:

- Stiff shoulder
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing

After treatment is finished, side effects MAY include:

Common:

- Breast tissue or chest wall may be more firm or heavy
- Long-term skin changes (e.g. darker, lighter or thinner)

Less Common:

- Swelling in the arm (lymphedema)
- Stiff shoulder
- Small amount of scarring on the lung (this rarely affects breathing)

Rare but can be serious:

- Increased risk of rib fracture
- Cough
- Skin or soft tissue breakdown causing sores or ulcers

- Long-term breast pain or chest wall pain that may require pain medication
- Low chance of the radiation injuring nerves in the arm
- When the left breast or chest wall is treated, there may be an increased risk of heart disease, pericarditis (causing a rapid heart rate, chest discomfort, or chest pain), or myocarditis (causing shortness of breath, chest pain, or permanent heart muscle damage).
- Risk of an injury to any part of the body that has received radiation during treatment. This may be serious, require major surgery and could be life threatening.
- There is a very low risk that a new cancer will be caused by the radiation in the future.

The severity of these side effects will vary from person to person. If you are having chemotherapy during your radiation treatments side effects may be worse. When you begin your radiation treatments, the radiation therapists will give you information to help you manage the side effects. You will also be able to meet with your radiation oncologist during your treatments to talk about any side effects that you may have.

This list may not all apply to your radiation treatment. Please speak to your radiation oncologist to understand what to expect from your treatment.