

The Effects of Radiation on Bone and other Soft Tissues



If you had radiotherapy to your arm, or leg or part of your chest or abdomen, especially if this was when you were young, the muscles and bones may not have grown as well as normal.

In the abdomen or chest, if only part was treated e.g. just on one side, the difference in growth might cause you to appear asymmetrical, i.e. a little lop-sided. This is usually hardly noticeable to others even if it seems obvious to you. The changes may be more obvious if you are overweight and so keeping slim is one way you can help disguise this.

Radiation to the arm or leg may produce more obvious changes. If the limb did not grow fully you may have needed an operation either to lengthen the treated limb or stop the good one from growing too much. If the leg is only a little shorter it may be possible to correct this by using a shoe raise, a thick insole, often provided by the physiotherapist, which can even up a slight difference. Unfortunately you might have a limp when you walk bare foot. Minor differences in arm length are not usually obvious although you may find that you have to adjust the sleeve length on some clothes. Muscles in your treated arm or leg may not have developed properly. The limb will therefore look smaller and may not be as strong. Physiotherapy may help to maintain strength but it is unlikely to increase muscle bulk.

It is important to use the affected limb in a normal way as much as possible. Weight bearing exercise is especially important to improve bone strength. To keep your bones healthy you need to include some calcium in your diet (milk, butter, cheese) fresh air, sunshine and exercise.



The weaker arm or leg may sometimes swell because of fluid retention, particularly after exercise or in hot weather. Sometimes support stockings will help swollen legs.

Very occasionally you can develop a swelling or lump in the area where you had the radiotherapy. It is very important that if you notice any change like this that you tell your clinic doctor or G.P., as there is a small chance of developing a tumour after radiotherapy.

If the doctor who gave you the radiotherapy doesn't come to your follow-up clinic you can ask to see him or her to discuss your problems in more detail if you wish.

Avoid sunburn, especially to the part of you that received radiotherapy.

visit www.aftercure.org for tips, advice and other useful websites

Keep a record of sites you find useful: