

Deodorant use ok for radiotherapy patients

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Women undergoing radiotherapy for breast cancer can use deodorant without fear of increased underarm skin reaction, pain, itching or burning, research suggests.

Patients have traditionally been advised to avoid using deodorant for the six to eight weeks of their [radiotherapy](#) treatment, but Curtin University scientist Lucy Lewis says the study's results indicate women should be

free to use aluminium-containing or non-aluminium deodorants if they choose.

"When radiotherapy was originally used for treating breast cancer, it could have quite a harsh effect on the skin; deodorant could make this worse, so women were advised not to use it, just a mild soap," Dr Lewis says.

"Although radiotherapy treatment has progressed over the years, women are still advised not to use deodorant."

But nurses in the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital cancer unit noticed some women were distressed by their body odour, while others were opting to use deodorants despite clinical advice not to do so.

"Having treatment for breast cancer may negatively alter a woman's body image; on top of that, women are asked not to use deodorant during their treatment, which can add stress to an already stressful situation," Dr Lewis says.

"Australia is a hot country; you can imagine, having to come in after a week of 40 degree heat, and not being able to use deodorant."

Spurred by overseas research that indicated no adverse effects from using deodorants during radiotherapy, Dr Lewis sourced funding for this nurse-led research.

Comparable skin reaction, reduced sweating

The study randomly assigned 333 women undergoing similar radiation therapy regimes to use soap, aluminium-containing deodorant and soap, or non-aluminium containing deodorant and soap.

"Most women having radiotherapy for breast cancer will have some form of [skin reaction](#); we were looking at whether that reaction was different between the three groups," she says.

The researchers found women in each group reported comparable levels of underarm skin reaction, pain, itching and burning, but those using aluminium-containing deodorant reported 85 per cent less sweating.

Dr Lewis says the study adds to growing evidence that using deodorant during radiotherapy does not exacerbate underarm skin reactions.

"This research helps empower [women](#) and clinicians to make an informed choice about [deodorant](#) use during radiotherapy for [breast cancer](#)," she says.

"The beauty of this study is that it was multidisciplinary, supported by the nurses, radiologists, radiotherapists, and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital...that's what made it such a success."

More information: "Evaluating the effects of aluminum-containing and non-aluminum containing deodorants on axillary skin toxicity during radiation therapy for breast cancer: a 3-armed randomized controlled trial." *Int J Radiat Oncol Biol Phys*. 2014 Nov 15;90(4):765-71. [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijrobp.2014.06.054](#). Epub 2014 Sep 3.

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