



Information For Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy to the Lung/Oesophagus or Chest Area

Cough

A cough may develop or worsen due to irritation caused by your radiation therapy treatment. Frequent sips of fluid can relieve this, especially at night. It is important to contact your doctor if your cough becomes a problem. In most cases a cough, which has worsened with treatment will settle down within weeks of finishing treatment. Radiation therapy may also increase the amount of blood and mucus coughed up in the few weeks following treatment. If you cough up yellow or green sputum either during or after treatment it is important to let your doctor know.

Other:

+ It is important to increase your fluid intake while on treatment. Try to increase your daily intake by at least 3 glasses. Include fluids such as water, milk and juices. Try to reduce tea, coffee and caffeine drinks.

It can be difficult to get through a long course of treatment without feeling low at some point. It is quite normal to feel up and down during radiation therapy and for several weeks afterwards. Please let us know when things get tough and we will do our best to help you.

After Treatment:

Radiation therapy is a cumulative treatment and it builds up on a daily basis. Any reactions that you have had may persist for several weeks after you finish your treatment. The reaction usually peaks around 2 weeks after you finish treatment. You should continue to follow any advice given until these side effects have subsided.

On your final day of treatment you will be given an appointment to see the doctor in approximately 6-8 weeks. At this appointment the doctor will discuss your progress.

We are here to help. If you would like more information on any aspect of your treatment, or you are troubled by anything, please speak to us.

Contact Telephone Numbers:

Radiation therapy Reception: 021-4922492

LA 1: 021-4922479

LA 2: 021-4922478

LA 3: 021-4921307

LA 4: 021-4921308



Radiation Therapy to the Lung/Oesophagus or Chest Area

This leaflet aims to provide information for patients receiving a course of radiation therapy to the lung/oesophagus or chest area. Your doctor may have already talked to you about this treatment but please ask if anything is still worrying you, however small you think it is. Each course of treatment is tailored to the individual, so your treatment plan may not be the same as somebody else's.

Daily Procedure:

- + The radiation therapists will position you on the treatment couch using the tattoos on your skin. It is important to be as relaxed as possible and try not to help them if they are moving you.
- + Once you are correctly positioned try not to move. You can breathe normally.
- + During treatment the radiation therapists will leave the room. They will watch you on monitors so if you have any problems just raise your hand. There is also an intercom system, which allows you to speak to them should you need to.
- + You will not see or feel anything, but you will hear the machine switch on. The machine will move around you but will not touch you.
- + It is essential that you do not move until a radiation therapist has told you that your treatment has finished.

Review Clinics:

- + A member of your consultant's medical team will see you routinely once a week. However we can arrange for you to see a doctor at any stage during your treatment should you need to.
- + You will have a blood test twice during your course of treatment. This will be done once at the beginning and again at the end of your course of treatment.

Side Effects:

The radiation therapy process is painless and unlikely to make you feel unwell. However there are some side effects associated with radiation therapy. You may notice one or more of them developing over the course of your treatment. Please note that it is rare for one patient to experience all of these side effects.

Skin Reaction

A skin reaction may occur in the treated area. It is common for skin soreness to develop during the course of treatment. The skin in the treated area may become itchy, dry and reddened. Aqueous cream should be applied twice daily. If your skin gets worse the radiation therapists, nurses or doctor can give you another cream. It is important to take extra care of the skin in the treatment area. Certain precautions should be taken:

- + You may gently bathe or shower using warm water.
- + Wash the treatment area using un-perfumed soap such as baby soap. The radiation therapists will show you where the treatment area covers.
- + **Do not** use any other products on the skin, unless recommended by radiation therapy staff. Some products may irritate the skin, so please ask us before using anything.
- + Pat the skin dry with a soft towel. Do not rub it.
- + Avoid spraying perfume or deodorant on the treatment area.
- + Wear loose comfortable clothing next to the skin, preferably natural fibres such as cotton.
- + Protect the skin from wind, sun and direct heat. A total sun block will be necessary on the treated area hereafter.
- + **Do not** expose skin to hot water bottles, ice packs etc.
- + **Do not** rub or scratch the skin as this will only make the reaction worse

We will monitor your skin during the course of your treatment. If you are worried or are experiencing any discomfort please discuss it with us.

Fatigue

Fatigue is another commonly experienced side effect of radiation therapy. It can range from a mild loss of energy to an overwhelming "bone-tired" feeling that is not always relieved by rest. You may find that you feel more tired as the treatment progresses. These are some ideas that may help.

- + Rest as much as you feel that you need to.
- + Gentle exercise such as walking 2-3 times a week can help reduce fatigue.
- + Do the things that you enjoy and that make you feel good such as reading, visiting with friends or spending time outdoors.
- + While many people find they are able to carry on working, others may need time off.

You can continue to drive a car if you wish. Many patients are able to drive themselves throughout their treatment.

It may take a while after your treatment finishes before any tiredness you may have been experiencing gradually disappears.

Hair Loss

Hair loss only occurs in the area that is being treated. You may therefore lose some of your body hair. Once radiation therapy is complete, the hair will usually grow back.

Nausea/Loss of Appetite

Nausea and loss of appetite may occur while you are on treatment.

- + Sufficient rest, a balanced diet and a good fluid intake will help minimise this.
- + Try eating small meals more often during the day.
- + A simple anti-sickness medication can be prescribed for you if you need it. Please speak to the radiation therapists or nurse about this.
- + If you lose a lot of weight or are concerned about your weight, please speak to us. We can arrange an appointment for you with a dietician for further dietary advice.

Breathlessness

If you are already breathless or suffer from chest discomfort the treatment may make it worse. Mild painkillers may relieve any pain in the area.

Soreness/Difficulty in Swallowing

Soreness on swallowing or indigestion can also occur. Here are some ideas that may help.

- + Taking an indigestion remedy that you already use can relieve indigestion, or your doctor can prescribe medication.
- + Eating smaller amounts of food more often may be easier to manage than large meals.
- + Try eating soft foods, which will be easier to swallow.
- + Let your food or drinks cool down before you eat or drink them.
- + Avoid spicy, sharp or sour foods, as they will only cause further irritation.
- + Eat foods as close to body temperature as possible. Do not have drinks with ice in them or milk straight from fridge.

These side effects should improve within a few weeks of finishing treatment.

Smoking and alcohol (especially spirits) should be avoided. They will only make reactions such as breathlessness or soreness on swallowing worse. Try to avoid smoking if possible. There is a smoking cessation officer available in the hospital to give you advice and support to help you quit smoking.