



Information For Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy to the Colorectal Area

Dietary Advice:

A normal diet with a variety of foods will help to give you energy and strength. We recommend that you continue on your current diet until you experience any side effects.

If you do experience diarrhoea as a result of your treatment, try making these changes to your diet in the short term:

- + Reduce the amount of fibre in your diet. Cut down on wholemeal, whole-wheat or granary bread, bran, high-fibre and whole grain cereals, raw vegetables, green leafy vegetables (cabbage, sprouts, spinach), fresh fruit (especially berry fruits, grapefruits, and oranges), dried fruits, nuts, peas, beans and lentils.
- + Avoid greasy, rich or highly spiced food.
- + Eat plenty of white bread, lean meat, white fish, cheese, eggs, pasta, potatoes and other root vegetables (carrots), rice milk puddings and tinned fruit (such as peaches or pears).
- + Again it is important to increase fluid intake as diarrhoea may cause dehydration.

If you do loose your appetite or loose weight, we can arrange an appointment with the dietician for you. They will be able to give you further dietary advice should you need it.

As your bowel habit returns to normal you can gradually re-introduce high fibre foods and return to your normal diet.

Other:

Smoking - 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.

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. Any reactions that you have may persist for several weeks after you finish your treatment. These reactions are usually most severe in the 1-2 weeks following 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 Colorectal Area

This leaflet aims to provide information for patients receiving a course of radiation therapy to the colorectal 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. You will have these once at the beginning and again at the end of your course of treatment.

Side Effects:

The radiation therapy process is painless. 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. This often happens in the groin or between the buttocks.

To help reduce any pain or discomfort 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. Do not have salt or dettol baths.
- + **Do not** soak for long periods.
- + 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 the 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.
- + Wear loose comfortable clothing next to the skin, preferably natural fibres such as cotton.
- + **Do not** expose skin to hot water bottles, ice-packs etc.
- + **Do not** rub or scratch the area as this will make the reaction worse.

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

Hair Loss

Hair loss only occurs in the area that is being treated. You may therefore lose some of your pubic hair. Once the radiation therapy is complete the hair usually grows back. This can take between six and twelve months. In some cases however, re-growth may not be complete.

Fatigue

Fatigue is another commonly experienced side effect of radiation therapy. It ranges 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 whether it is 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 to. 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.

Bladder Irritation

- + Bladder irritation may occur. Radiation therapy can irritate the lining of the bladder and may result in some of the following symptoms.
 - + **Frequency** (the need to pass urine more often than usual)
 - + **Urgency** (the need to pass urine suddenly, with little warning)
 - + **Pain** on passing urine
 - + **Difficulty** in passing urine
 - + **Blood** in the urine

This problem is usually temporary and resolves soon after treatment has finished.

- + It is important to increase your fluid intake while on treatment. Try to increase your daily intake by at least three glasses. Include fluids such as water, milk and juices. Try to reduce tea, coffee and caffeine drinks.
- + We recommend and advise patients to drink at least one glass of cranberry juice daily.
- + Increasing your fluid intake will increase clearance through the bladder and reduce the severity of these side effects.

Bowel Irritation

Radiation therapy can cause bowel irritation. This may result in more frequent bowel movements, diarrhoea or mucus discharge. Altering your diet may help this. However, if the problem persists medication may have to be prescribed.