Medical Services - Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy to chest/lung/oesophagus
Information for patients, carers and their families

What is radiation therapy?
Radiation therapy is a precise and localised treatment. Any related side effects will only occur within the area being treated. Each person is very much an individual so not everyone will experience the same side effects even if you are receiving similar treatments.

You will receive regular treatment reviews from your Radiation Oncologist and weekly reviews by your Nurse. If you are concerned about any aspect of your treatment, and or new problems arise between these review times please notify your Radiation Therapists and they will assist you.

Possible side effects
- Dry or irritated skin in the treatment area.
- Tiredness or fatigue.
- Heartburn, pain on swallowing if the oesophagus is within the treatment area
  - 20mL of Gaviscon® or Mylanta® can relieve heartburn
- Dry cough
- Hair loss in the treatment area

General advice to follow during your radiation treatment
- Shower daily, using a warm gentle flow.
- Only use a mild soap (e.g. Dove® Sensitive). Pat the skin dry after your shower, do not rub the skin.
- Apply aqueous cream (e.g. Sorbolene® or MooGoo® Skin Milk Udder Cream) to the skin at night to prevent skin dryness and reduce irritation. Avoid applying just before treatment.
- Areas of your skin that react during radiation treatment will always be more sensitive and at risk of sun damage even when your treatment has finished. You will always need to protect them from the sun:
  - Wear a hat
  - Wear loose fitting, cotton clothing
  - Use sunscreen with a high protection factor (but do not use this on the treatment site during treatment)
  - Try to stay in the shade.
- Maintain a well-balanced diet as good nutrition is very important for healing the ‘good’ cells in your body.
- Feeling tired during treatment is normal. It is beneficial to keep up normal daily exercise and engage in moderate exercise e.g. walking. Cut work hours back if excessive tiredness occurs and have a nap as required.
- Please inform the radiation therapists or the nursing staff if you are experiencing increased shortness of breath or excessive coughing.

This patient publication was developed with input from healthcare consumers. The Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service is accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards. For more information see www.safetyandquality.gov.au or ask a member of staff.

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Diet

• You can see a dietician who will offer you advice on nutrition and help you with your individual needs if you are having issues.

• These are some general tip:
  • Eat frequent small meals rather than three (3) large meals
  • Drink eight (8) cups of water a day.
  • Drink frequently while eating as this will make chewing and swallowing easier
  • Food served at room temperature is better tolerated
  • Avoid spicy food and alcohol

Smoking

You are strongly advised not to smoke. Smoking during and after treatment will reduce the chance of treatment being successful.

It will also make the reaction to radiotherapy worse and significantly increase the risk of late side effects.

Please ask for advice from any member of the team if you would like help to quit.

Further information

For further up to date evidence-based information, please refer to www.eviq.org.au

Nursing staff can be contacted 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday by phoning 5202 1111.