

Top Tips for radiation

Each person reacts to treatment differently. Varying factors include the different area being treated, the type and dose of radiation given, and whether the patient has also had chemotherapy or surgery prior to receiving radiation.

✳ First 2-4 sessions may be quite daunting. This is largely due to being a new experience and the fear of the unknown. The first sessions will be longer in duration (30-40mins) than the sessions to follow (15-20mins). The room is quite large, cold and noisy.

✳ You need to lie very still during your session so make sure that you are comfortable before the radiology technicians start. Speak to the medical team present about any anxiety or discomfort you are feeling.

✳ Radiation does not burn, sting or burn when it enters your body.

✳ Sessions are usually every day, Monday to Friday. And, dependent on your personal treatment plan, could last for 3 - 9 weeks.

✳ Take a beanie if your radiation area is not your head. This helps you to feel slightly warmer, and it also cushions your head.

✳ During your treatment period, your radiation oncologist will check on you once a week with an appointment to track your progress.

✳ Side effects are generally short-term, mild and treatable, and usually come to an end shortly after treatment is finished.

✳ Side effects are fatigue and skin irritation. Hair loss and mouth problems can occur when radiation is given to these specific areas. Rarely, radiation can cause changes in your blood count. If your blood tests show low blood counts, your treatment may be stopped to allow your count to return to normal. This side effect is more likely to happen if radiation is given at the same time as chemotherapy.

✳ Radiation to the brain can cause headaches, memory loss, nausea, vomiting, hair loss and seizures.

✳ Radiation to the head and neck can cause a sore throat, sores in mouth and throat, trouble swallowing, tooth decay, changes in taste, earaches and jaw stiffness.

✳ Get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids and eat a balance diet to help your body heal during and after your treatment.

✳ SKIN CARE GUIDELINES

- ▶ Skin changes are common, and are expected, during radiation therapy
- ▶ After 2-3 weeks of radiation, skin may become pink or tanned. As treatment continues, the skin may become bright red or very dark. It could also become dry and flaky. Some patients can experience a rash or blisters in the treatment area. The blisters may open and peel.
- ▶ Skin reactions should improve 3-4 weeks after the treatment is finished
- ▶ You will be tattooed before your treatment round is due to start. These are permanent and won't wash off.
- ▶ You may be marked with a semi-permanent marker during treatments. Do not wipe this off until your radiation oncologist approves this. Remove with mineral oil.

✳ SEVERITY OF THE SKIN REACTIONS DEPEND ON THE FOLLOWING CARE:

- ▶ Do not use soap, creams, makeup, perfumes, deodorant or aftershave on the area being treated
- ▶ Bath or shower daily using medium warm water, rinse and pat down the skin with a soft towel. Do not rub.
- ▶ Do not shave the treated area
- ▶ Use cornflour (Maizena) to dust over your skin and under your arms on the areas that have been treated
- ▶ Be aware that the treated area is sensitive to extreme temperatures, hot or cold. This includes the use of hot water bottles, heating pads, hot baths, and ice packs.
- ▶ Do not apply any patches to the treated area, including pain patches.
- ▶ Be sun-wise and protect your skin during, and after, radiation therapy.
- ▶ Practice caution when swimming in a chlorinated pool, or the ocean. Rinse off the chlorine or salt as soon as possible.
- ▶ Wear loose-fitting clothing to prevent irritation of the treated area
- ▶ Talk to your medical team about which body care products are safe to use during, and after, treatment. There can be varying degrees of advice from different parties. Be sure to stay away from products containing synthetic fragrances, petrochemicals, colourants, and sodium laurel sulphates which de-stabilises the skin and is harsh on this raw, healing layer. Opt for natural products with plant and essential oils.

