

# Receiving Radiation Treatment to the Chest

This information will help you and those close to you care for you during your treatment. You may want to show it to your support people so that they also have an understanding of your treatment. We believe you should know what to look for, and how to encourage the healing process in your body.

It is common for patients having radiation treatment to their chest to experience discomfort, difficulty swallowing, cough, skin reactions, nausea and tiredness. The reactions build up slowly over the course of treatment and may be more noticeable if you are also undergoing a course of chemotherapy. Your treatment team will help you manage these side effects. It is important to remember that all patients react differently to treatment. Do ask your treatment team if you have any questions, concerns or are experiencing problems.

## What side effects can I expect?

### Skin Reactions

During your radiation treatment you may have a skin reaction in the treated area.

Reactions may include:

- Skin becoming pink or red
- Skin becoming dry and flaky
- Skin feeling warm
- Skin feeling itchy
- Skin becoming sore and sensitive
- Temporary hair loss in treatment area only.

These reactions are normal and the severity of the reaction differs from person to person.

## How should I care for my skin?

From the beginning of treatment

### Please Do

- Use a simple moisturiser such as Health E Fatty Cream, Aveno or Calendula Cream on the treated area.
- Avoid being in the sun for long periods of time. If this is unavoidable please cover the area being treated as much as possible. Do not use Sunscreen until skin has completely healed.
- Use your normal soap or shower gel
- Carry on using deodorant unless it is sore to do so or the staff advise you to stop.
- Personal hygiene is important so please bathe or shower regularly. Use a soft towel and pat the skin dry rather than rubbing it.

## What should I do if I get a skin reaction?

If your skin is:

- **Pink or red or dry and flaky** – carry on with general skincare advice.
- **Feeling warm** – use a cold compress, fan or hair dryer on cool setting, or try cooling your Health E fatty cream in the fridge.
- **Feeling itchy** – avoid scratching or rubbing the treatment area as this may increase the reaction.
- Continue to moisturise the area and let your treatment team know as they can offer further advice.

### Tiredness

Some people feel tired during their treatment. This can be caused by a number of reasons - travelling to and from treatment, change in routine, anxiety about treatment, recent chemotherapy, and the radiation treatment itself. Most people don't find the tiredness too difficult to manage. They may

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need a nap in the afternoon or sometimes to take time off work. If you are having difficulties sleeping, mention this at your weekly review.

### **Nausea and Vomiting**

Nausea and vomiting is a possible side effect. If you are having nausea or vomiting please tell your treatment team as there is advice we can offer.

### **Discomfort**

Some patients will have some discomfort as a result of their treatment, or the position their arms need to be in for treatment. If you are having any discomfort, talk to your treatment team.

### **Pain/Difficulty Swallowing**

If the treatment is covering your oesophagus (gullet) then you may have a sore throat and/or difficulty swallowing. Let the treatment team know if you are having these symptoms.

### **What else do I need to know about treatment?**

#### **Smoking**

We strongly advise you to stop smoking as this can make the side effects of treatment worse. Please talk to your treatment team about the support available to help you stop smoking.

#### **Contraception during and after Treatment**

If you are a woman of childbearing age, it is important that you do not become pregnant during your treatment. Radiation treatment given during pregnancy can harm a developing baby. You will need to confirm that you are not pregnant before starting your treatment, and that you understand you should avoid becoming pregnant during treatment (this means you will need to use a reliable form of birth control if you are sexually active). You can ask your doctors for information about this.

#### **Vitamins and Dietary supplements**

Some vitamin or dietary supplements are not suitable to be taken during treatment. Please discuss them with your doctor or treatment team.

### **What happens after treatment?**

Reactions usually peak about 2 weeks after treatment. Your skin will usually return to normal about 6 weeks after treatment. Follow the advice in this information sheet until the reaction has subsided.

### **Radiation Pneumonitis**

Radiation pneumonitis is an inflammation of the lungs which is caused by radiation treatment. It can make you feel short of breath, cause chest pain when breathing, a cough, and possibly a fever. Radiation pneumonitis can occur in some people around 6 weeks to 6 months after treatment finishes. If you having these symptoms, tell your GP so you can be referred to oncology services.

### **Support Services**

Please ask a member of your treatment team if you would like more information or to access any of these services.

- Cancer Society
- Social work
- Fit for Life
- Living well
- Look Good Feel Better
- Wigs
- Counselling
- Support groups
- Cancer Connect
- Massage
- www.lgfb.co.nz

## **Contact us**

**Radiation Treatment Department**  
**Wellington Blood & Cancer Centre**  
**Level 2, Wellington Regional Hospital**  
**Phone: (04) 806 2000**

**Hours: 8am-4.30pm, Monday to Friday**

### **Urgent After Hours Advice**

After 4.30pm and on weekends for advice related to your treatment contact Ward 5 North Phone: (04) 806 0418