

PATIENT INFORMATION FOR RADIATION THERAPY OF THE HEAD & NECK



SUPPORTING YOU DURING TREATMENT

You will be reviewed regularly during your treatment by your Team. Please report any concerns to the Triage Nurse or to the Radiation Therapists on your treatment unit prior to having your treatment.

We are here to support you whilst you undergo radiation therapy. If you have medical conditions that are not cancer related please continue to seek advice from your general practitioner.

If at any time you feel you are very unwell, you should not wait until your next radiation therapy appointment. Please go to your nearest emergency department.

MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS

Radiation therapy side effects vary from person to person. The following are some common side effects.

SORE MOUTH AND THROAT & SWALLOWING DIFFICULTIES

During treatment the inside of your mouth or throat may become dry, sore or ulcerated. It can cause chewing and / or swallowing difficulties and your sense of taste may alter.

- Please ask the Triage Nurse to assist you with management if these symptoms occur.
- It is important to keep your mouth and teeth clean. After eating gently brush your teeth with a very soft toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Rinse your mouth at least 4 times per day with a warm salt water or sodium bicarbonate mouthwash as below:
- ½ teaspoon of salt to one glass (200ml) water.
OR
- 1 teaspoon of sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) to one glass (200ml) water.
- A maximum of 4g daily of soluble paracetamol e.g. Panadol may be gargled or swallowed.
- Avoid irritants such as cigarettes and alcohol.
- A dietitian will see you early in your treatment.

DRY MOUTH

This occurs because radiation affects the glands which produce saliva.

- Carry a flask of water with you to sip.
- Chewing gum can stimulate saliva secretion.
- Eat foods with sauces and gravies.

HOARSE VOICE

If your treatment includes your throat, your voice may become hoarse or you may temporarily lose your voice.

- Please ask the Triage Nurse to assist with management if these symptoms occur.

NAUSEA & VOMITING

This treatment may cause nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting.

- If you feel sick please let the Triage Nurse know.
- If necessary you will be seen by a dietitian early in your treatment.

TIREDNESS

It is not unusual to feel tired while you are having treatment.

- Rest if necessary.
- See the Triage Nurse for more information.

SKIN REACTION

- During radiation therapy the skin in the treatment area may become red and sore. It is important not to use anything on your skin which may cause irritation. Use only the products advised by the staff.
- Hair loss may occur in the treatment area.

Please follow these guidelines:

Do:

- Use mild, unscented, non-alcohol based soap.
- Use warm water, rinse and pat dry with a soft towel.
- Use a moisturiser, like sorbolene with 10% glycerine, which does not contain perfumes or additives and is a thin lotion not a thick cream.
- Avoid sun exposure to the treatment area – wear a wide-brimmed hat.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Avoid things that will irritate or abrade the skin in the treatment area e.g. wet shaving – use an electric shaver.

Do not:

- Use any tape or bandaids on the treatment area.
- Rub, scrub or scratch the skin in the treatment area.
- Use any creams, lotions, powders etc. unless recommended by your treatment team.
- Use hot packs, hot water bottles, hot water, cold packs or ice packs on the treatment area.
- Do not use a hair dryer near the treatment area.

AFTER TREATMENT INSTRUCTIONS

After you have completed your radiation therapy it is important to remember to manage your symptoms until they have subsided.

- Continue your mouth care and modified diet until healing has occurred.
- The skin reaction may become worse after treatment has finished. Continue your skin care regime until the skin heals.
- Always keep the treated area out of direct sunlight.
- Continue to avoid alcohol and smoking as voice hoarseness and increased coughing may continue after treatment is completed.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER RADIATION THERAPY?

At your last 'On Treatment Review' appointment, your doctor will decide on the appropriate follow-up care.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information visit eviQ Cancer Treatments Online, an online service of the Cancer Institute NSW:
www.eviQ.org.au

If you are worried about anything, or are unsure of how to manage, please speak to the Triage Nurse or telephone **(02) 4014 3654**.

If you have any concerns **after 4 pm contact the Emergency Department on (02) 4921 1211**