

When you return to begin your treatments, you will meet the radiation therapists who deliver your daily treatments. Treatments are scheduled Monday through Friday. The exact number of treatments will be determined by your physician and is designed to best meet your specific treatment needs.

Radiation therapy is closed for certain holidays, and you will be notified if a holiday occurs during your course of treatment. Due to the number of patients under treatment and emergency hospital patients, there can be delays in the time of your daily treatment. We appreciate your patience.

Side Effects

At your initial consultation, your radiation physician reviewed the anticipated results and side effects of the radiation plan determined to best fit your needs. This handout is to acquaint you with some of the most common side effects that can occur because of your treatment. It will also explain some of the things that can be done to help manage these side effects.

It is important to remember that most people do not experience all of the side effects mentioned here. Please keep us informed of your particular needs so that appropriate recommendations can be provided for you.

Sore Throat/Difficulty

Often with radiation treatments to the chest, the esophagus (food tube) is within the radiation field. This causes inflammation of the lining, resulting in a variety of symptoms:

- Symptoms generally begin after 2 weeks of treatment. These may be sooner or more severe if chemotherapy is used together in your care.
- Symptoms can vary greatly:
 - Some patients may notice a sensation of a lump in the throat.
 - Some patients will progress to a sore throat with pain on swallowing.
 - Discomfort can progress, resulting in difficulty swallowing foods and fluids.

Symptoms are temporary and will resolve slowly after treatment is completed.

Some dietary changes that may minimize this discomfort are:

- Eat foods that are soft and moist. They can be swallowed more comfortably than those that are firm, rough-textured, and/or dry.
- Eat smaller amounts at more frequent intervals.
- Avoid highly seasoned foods, acidic foods, and foods that are very hot or very cold.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, as they may result in dryness and irritation of your throat.
- Avoid carbonated beverages.
- Use liquid antacids, such as Mylanta or Maalox, for tightness and/or burning with swallowing.

It is most important to avoid dehydration. Please keep a record of the type and amount of fluids that you consume for our clinical staff to review with you. Please report any symptoms of dehydration to our clinical staff (lightheadedness on standing, lower blood pressure, etc.).

Cough

You may already have some cough before beginning your radiation treatments. This may increase during your treatment. Occasionally patients will note a small amount of blood in their sputum. Do not be alarmed; this is a normal effect due to inflammation of tissues in the treatment area. Increased intake of clear liquids may help your symptoms. Our clinical staff may prescribe cough suppressants for you.

Nausea

With chest radiation, it is unusual for nausea to occur because the stomach lies below the treatment area. If this should occur, please notify our clinical staff so medications can be prescribed for you.

Nutrition

Maintaining your weight is a very important part of your treatment program. Eating well helps maintain your strength and energy and provides building blocks for repair of normal tissues. You will feel better and, thus, be more able to cope with your therapy and possible side effects. If you are having difficulty eating, please inform our clinical staff so appropriate recommendations may be provided for you.

Skin Reactions

Because radiation beams must penetrate the skin to reach the target area, most patients will experience some degree of skin irritation. This can affect the skin, hair follicles, and moisturizing glands. The degree of skin reaction is influenced by a number of factors:

- Skin reactions are increased with prior or concurrent use of chemotherapy agents.
- Acute skin reactions generally begin 2 to 3 weeks after the initiation of radiation.
- Skin reactions generally resolve within approximately 2 to 4 weeks after completion of treatment.
- Late effects in the skin can include atrophy, pigment changes, thinning, and changes in the appearance of superficial blood vessels.

Our clinical staff will monitor your skin and advise you on appropriate therapy as needed.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a common experience in patients with cancer. It is believed that this results from a combination of factors, including: 1) your body's effort to reserve energy for healing; 2) your body's effort to process the waste products from the cancer cells killed from treatment; 3) anemia related to cancer treatments; 4) the act of going to radiation treatments 5 times a week.

Fatigue may occur around the second or third week of radiation and can persist up to 3 months after the completion of treatment.

Strategies you can use to reduce energy expenditure:

- Planning/scheduling activities (e.g., spreading chores over the course of the week; planning to take a nap in the afternoon).
- Decreasing non-essential activities, such as cleaning, cooking, or socializing.
- Increasing dependence on others (allowing family members or friends to assist in housework, childcare, and shopping).

Other activities that patients have reported helpful in reducing their fatigue during treatment include:

- Walking/light exercise
- Distractions (gardening, listening to music)
- Balancing pleasurable activities with work activities

Blood Counts

If you are receiving chemotherapy during your radiation treatments, your medical oncologist will be checking your blood counts periodically during your treatment.

NOTE: Please inform our clinical staff if your chemotherapy is being held due to low blood counts.

While Receiving Radiation

You will have scheduled visits with our clinical staff at least one time per week during treatment. We will be assessing your progress and making recommendations to you on changes in your care program as needed. Our clinical staff will be available at any time if you have questions or concerns that need to be addressed between these scheduled weekly visits.