

Radiotherapy to the Head and Neck



Hermitage Medical Clinic

A Community Hospital for our Patients' Needs

You will see the Radiation Therapists daily and your consultant weekly while you are on radiotherapy. If you are having difficulty contact us 01-6459045. For emergencies outside of radiotherapy hours please call the Hermitage Medical Clinic on 01-6459000.

Radiotherapy Side Effects

Oral Hygiene

- Oral mucositis or inflammation of the lining of the mouth is the most common side effect experienced by patients receiving radiotherapy to the head and neck region.
- This can involve some soreness and reddening of the mouth as well as some difficulty eating and swallowing.
- You must keep your mouth clean as you are more likely to get an infection during and after radiotherapy.
- Particular mouth washes and sponges can be used to clean your mouth.
- Continue eating as this will naturally clean your mouth of lingering bacteria.

Dietary Requirements

- Avoid hot, spicy or very cold food or drink. Also avoid hard foods such as toast.
- Avoid alcohol (particularly spirits) and tobacco during treatment as they can irritate the lining of the mouth.

Voice Changes

- Your voice may become hoarse during treatment.

Difficulty swallowing

- Radiotherapy can irritate your throat and make it difficult to eat and swallow food and drink.
- If you are struggling to eat as you normally would: try to eat little and often, eat your favourite foods and substitute lower calorie items for high calorie equivalents.
- Pain killers may be prescribed if necessary.

Skin Reaction

- Your skin can become red and itchy in the treatment area
- Use Simple Soap with E45 or Aqueous Cream to wash and moisturise the treatment area.
- Wash the treated skin gently with warm water, and pat dry with a soft towel.

- Wear something loose and comfortable, preferably Cotton.
- Do not expose the treatment area to extreme hot or cold as it is now more sensitive.
- Avoid shaving with a razor in the treatment area, you may use an electric shaver alternatively.
- If your skin starts to become red or itchy avoid swimming as the chlorine may irritate your skin.

Hair Loss

- You will lose your hair in the area being treated approximately three weeks into your treatment.
- Your hair may grow back slightly thinner or a different colour or texture.
- Your hair may not grow back if we are treating an area on the hair line.
- During radiotherapy use a mild baby shampoo and gently towel dry your hair.

Tiredness

- You will become tired during and after you course of treatment.
- Know your limits and do not exceed them. Rest when you need to and get at least 8 hours sleep each night.
- Drink at least 2 litres of water daily and maintain a healthy balanced diet.

Pregnancy Status (if applicable)

- It is very important that you do not become pregnant during the course of your radiotherapy.
- You will need to use contraception while you are on treatment if you are of child-bearing age and if you are sexually active. Your hospital or family doctor can give you advice on contraception, family planning or Well Woman Clinics will also advise you.
- If you think you may be pregnant please inform the Radiation Therapist or Consultant as soon as possible.