



Information for
patients and
carers

Radiotherapy for Head and Neck Cancer

You should have also received the following leaflets:

- Radiotherapy- a general guide for patients and carers
- Planning your radiotherapy treatment to the head and neck
- Radiotherapy treatment
- Skin Care during Radiotherapy treatment
- Dietary Advice during radiotherapy treatment
- Looking after your mouth during radiotherapy

What are the benefits of this treatment?

Radiotherapy has damaging effects on any remaining cancer cells. It will also cause some damage to surrounding healthy tissues resulting in some side effects. The radiotherapy is given to try to kill the cancer cells in your head and neck and reduce the chances of the cancer returning.

Are there any alternatives to this treatment?

The oncologist may have advised you about other possible treatments. These may include surgery or chemotherapy or a combination of these with radiotherapy. They will be happy to discuss any concerns you still have.

What will happen if you do not have this treatment?

If you choose not to have this treatment the cancer may continue to grow. Symptoms may develop and worsen. Some cancers may advance and become incurable.

Side effects- early reactions

Fatigue

As radiotherapy can damage normal tissues close to or in the treated area, your body is healing these damaged cells. This commonly causes tiredness. If you feel fit enough, gentle exercise can help. Eating nourishing food and drinking plenty of water may also help to provide your body with the nutrients your cells need to repair themselves. Do not force yourself to do things you do not have the energy to do.

Sore, red skin (erythema)

Radiotherapy can make the skin in the treated area become itchy, red, and sore. You can minimise this by following the advice of the radiographers (and our skin care leaflet).

Sore mouth and throat

If the treated area includes your mouth or throat, the lining will become very sore as treatment progresses. You may find that your mouth becomes very dry and it is difficult to swallow. You may also notice that food and drink tastes different. Other potential problems are thrush (a fungal infection in your mouth) and a coated tongue. Please follow the advice in our mouth care leaflet.

It is essential that you keep your mouth clean from the start of treatment to prevent infection.

Hoarseness

This is a common side effect in people whose throats are included in the treatment area. As treatment progresses you may find your voice disappears altogether. Try to rest your voice as much as possible and avoid smoking. If you would like help to stop smoking please ask for a leaflet about the support we can offer.

Side effects- late reactions

These depend on the exact area treated but can include:

Dental problems

It is important to visit a dentist regularly

Skin changes

Skin can become discoloured and patches of small blood vessels may appear near the skin surface

Swallowing difficulties

This may require referral to a speech and language therapist

Ulcers

Sometimes these can take time to heal

Damage to bone and cartilage

In rare cases there can be damage to the jaw or voice box, which may require surgery to correct. This is more common in patients who smoke during and after their treatment.

Always make sure you let the radiographers know if you get any side effects. We need you to tell us exactly how you feel not only with regard to side effects, but also your general wellbeing. We are here to help.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

Radiotherapy Reception/Transport queries (01772) 522900

Radiotherapy Appointment queries (01772) 522931

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.macmillan.org.uk

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking including Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal.

If you want to stop smoking you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

Gujarati:

આ માહિતીને સમજવામાં સહાયતા જોઈતી હોય તો કૃપા કરીને પૂછો. આ માહિતી મોટા છપાણામાં અને અન્ય ભાષામાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરી શકાય છે.

Romanian:

Vă rugăm să întrebați dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru înțelegerea acestor informații. Aceste informații pot fi puse la dispoziție în format mare și în alte limbi.”

Polish:

Poinformuj nas, jeśli potrzebna jest ci pomoc w zrozumieniu tych informacji. Informacje te można również udostępnić dużym drukiem oraz w innych językach

Punjabi:

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਸਮਝਣ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਦਦ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਛੋ। ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਿੰਟ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।

Urdu:

دو سر ی زبانوں او ر بڑی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے لیے مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو یی چھپا یں ییہ ابی دست بو یسکت ہے برا ئے مہر یان پو ے یچھہ ی۔ معلومات

Arabic:

مطبوعة بأحرف كبيرة و بلغات إذا كنت تريد مساعدة في فهم هذه المعلومات يُرجى أن تطلب أخرى يمكن تو فسير هذه المعلومات

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Division: Surgery
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