

Advice following treatment with high dose radiotherapy

Information for patients with lung cancer

Introduction

Now you've finished your radiotherapy, you may be wondering what happens next and how you may feel following your treatment.

You might experience a variety of side effects. These can include:

Effects of radiotherapy

You are not radioactive and cannot harm your relatives or friends.

Fatigue

This may last for several months but should improve over time. Gentle exercise such as walking will help. If you have a specific disability you can be referred to your local physiotherapist by your GP for an exercise programme designed to meet your needs and goals.

Swallowing

You may find it uncomfortable to swallow towards the end of your treatment and for a few weeks following your treatment. You may even feel there is a lump in your throat when you swallow. This is because the gullet is very sensitive to radiotherapy.

You may be given a white chalky liquid called Oxetacaine and antacid to take regularly before meals and at night if you are having discomfort when swallowing. You may also need to take some strong painkillers as well. Your nurse/radiographer can advise you. You should adjust your diet to include softer foods avoiding too hot, too cold, or spicy foods.

Poor appetite

This should improve quickly. Eat small amounts often and take plenty of fluids. Soft foodstuffs such as soups, puddings and eggs are easier to take. Try and use foods like honey, full fat milk and cheese which are high in calories.

Shortness of breath

Radiotherapy can cause scarring of the lung. This can lead to your lungs not working quite as well as they did before and you may notice an increase in breathlessness.

Cough

Radiotherapy can cause you to develop a cough or make a cough you already have worse. If you develop a cough with yellow/green phlegm you should visit your GP. Some people can develop a dry cough approximately 6 weeks after completing radiotherapy. If this happens to you, please contact your Nurse specialist.

Skin changes

Sometimes you can get a pink, dry itchy patch where you were treated. This may darken and peel like sunburn. This is nothing to worry about. You will be given Zerobase cream to apply to your skin. Apply frequently and liberally to your treated area.

Other issues

Smoking cessation

If you still smoke, stopping at any time will help you get better sooner and live longer.

We are happy to refer you to smoking cessation. You can discuss this with your nurse or radiographer.

Holidays and insurance

You can travel on holiday once you feel able to. There is no restriction on flying unless you have had surgery. You can obtain advice about insurance from the Maggie's Centre.

Relationships

You can continue a physical relationship with your partner but you may feel more breathless or tired. Discuss with them or with your healthcare team how to help with this.

Clinic appointment

You will be contacted by phone weekly for 4 weeks following your treatment.

An appointment with your Cancer Team will be sent out to you approximately 4-6 weeks following your treatment.

You will receive a CT scan approximately 4 months after the end of your treatment.

Contact details

You will have been given a contact number for your Nurse Specialist. Please ring them with any concerns during office hours.

Your GP will be informed of your progress and the treatment you have had. You should inform them of any problems you are having.

There is also a 24 hour treatment helpline for concerns related to treatment on 0800 917 7711. This can be accessed for up to six weeks following treatment.

