

Kent Oncology Centre

Radiotherapy Side Effects and Management: Lung Cancer

Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the side effects that may occur when having external radiotherapy to the lung. It also explains the best management of these side effects. If you would like to speak to one of the radiotherapy team please feel free to contact them on the numbers given below:

Maidstone Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists
Appointment enquiries

 01622 225094

 01622 225080

Kent & Canterbury Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists

 01227 766877

Ext 722 2711

Appointment enquiries

 01227 783010

You will be given a copy of our leaflet 'External Beam Radiotherapy' which we advise you to read alongside this leaflet; it provides general information about radiotherapy and useful contact numbers. If you have not been given a copy please ask. Our leaflets can also be found on the **Kent Oncology Centre website:** www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Side effects of external radiotherapy to the lung

Some side effects may occur, usually towards the end of the course of treatment and also during the first few weeks after treatment has finished. Treatments given over several weeks give more side effects than a short course of treatment.

These side effects can be upsetting and may require you to make some adjustments to your normal life, but most are temporary and will gradually disappear after a few weeks. However, some side effects may continue for, and some may only become apparent after, months or years following treatment. It is important to discuss these with your consultant as help may be available. Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive; it is safe to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.

Pregnant?

Please tell the medical staff if you might be pregnant; radiotherapy can harm the developing baby.

Short term side effects

You will be monitored throughout your treatment by the radiotherapy team. Please let them know if you experience any of the following problems:

Tiredness

Radiotherapy can make you tired so you may need more rest than usual, especially if you have to travel a long way for treatment every day. Rest as needed, but it is good to try to get some exercise each day, however gentle.

Loss of appetite and sickness

Some people lose their appetite as an effect of radiotherapy. It is often better to try to eat little and often. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids, e.g. water, squash, fruit juice, milk and soups.

If you struggle to eat much, it is a good idea to supplement your meals with nutritious high-calorie drinks. These are available on prescription or can be bought from the chemists. The radiographers can arrange for you to see a dietitian who can advise you on your diet.

Occasionally radiotherapy can make you feel sick (nauseous). This can often be helped by drinking more fluids but medication can be prescribed if needed.

Difficulty swallowing

Radiotherapy can make your gullet inflamed, causing discomfort. You may not be able to swallow properly for a while; medicines can be prescribed to help. We recommend you eat soft food and avoid smoking, drinking spirits and eating hot or spicy foods. You should drink plenty of bland, cool fluids e.g. milk and water.

Skin changes

Skin reactions in the treatment area should be mild, with slight redness and itching, but your skin reaction can be affected by the dose and type of treatment that your consultant has prescribed. It can also be dependent on your type of skin, your shape, any existing conditions such as diabetes and especially if you smoke.

Tips for helping your skin include:

- Wash the skin gently using soap or aqueous cream and gently pat dry.
 - To reduce irritation to the treatment area you may use a moisturiser sparingly.
 - Wear loose fitting natural fibre clothing next to the skin.
 - Avoid heating and cooling pads/ice.
 - Avoid hair removal products.
 - Avoid adhesive tape.
 - Ensure the treated skin is covered when out in the sun. Your skin may be more sensitive to the sun especially in your first year after treatment; it is advisable to apply a high factor sun screen.
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After finishing treatment you may be aware of your skin reaction becoming worse for up to another two weeks. Continue with the suggested skin care tips, returning gradually to your usual skin care regime when your skin has returned to normal.

Cough

It is quite common to develop a cough during or after radiotherapy for lung cancer. You may have a 'sticky' cough with mucous to bring up, or you may have a dry, tickly cough. You can ask your GP or consultant for cough medicine, but these may not help much.

The cough should go soon after treatment is complete. However, if it persists and you feel feverish or unwell you should tell your GP. The cough may be due to an infection rather than the treatment, and you may need antibiotics.

Chest pain

You may experience chest pain when you are having radiotherapy to the chest in one or two doses. It usually occurs within 24 hours of having the treatment. It is nothing to worry about and goes away by itself, but it is important that you tell your GP or radiotherapy team in case the pain is caused by something else. Painkillers can be prescribed.

Temperature and shivering

You may have a raised temperature and feel shivery if you have treatment in one or two doses. Paracetamol will usually stop the shivering and bring down your temperature. Tell your GP if you have these symptoms as they can sometimes be due to a chest infection.

Hair loss

You will only lose hair in the area being treated, i.e. your chest. The hair usually grows back within a few months, but it can be patchy.

Still smoking?

Smoking during treatment will reduce the success of your treatment. Please ask for help if this is a problem for you.

Late side effects

These effects are likely to be permanent and your consultant will refer you to appropriate specialists.

- Breathlessness
- Narrowing of your gullet (oesophagus)

Unfortunately doctors can't tell beforehand who will develop long term side effects and who won't. People vary quite widely in their reactions to radiotherapy and a few seem to be more than usually sensitive. It is important to remember that treating your cancer is the priority. However, your radiotherapy specialist team will do all they can to reduce the risk of any long term side effects. They will discuss any possible side effects with you before you agree to have treatment.

Please use this space to write any notes or questions you may have.

Further information and advice

Kent Oncology Macmillan Cancer Information Centre, Maidstone Hospital

Offers support and information to anyone who has concerns about cancer (patients, relatives, friends or carers).

☎ 01622 227064

Macmillan Cancer Support

Provide practical, medical and financial information

☎ 0808 808 0000 (Freephone)

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Choices for cancer information prescriptions

Website: www.nhs.uk/ipg

Cancer Research

This charity provides information about cancer, treatment and clinical trials.

☎ 0808 800 4040

Website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Patient Experience Teams (PALS) for East Kent patients

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

Desk at the outpatient's entrance of the hospital

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital

Office at the main entrance of the hospital (Ramsgate Road)

William Harvey Hospital

Desk at the main entrance of the hospital

☎ 01227 783145 or 01227864314

Email: ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Macmillan Cancer Support.

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

Telephone: ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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