

Kent Oncology Centre

Radiotherapy Side Effects and Management: Thyroid Cancer

Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the side effects that may occur when having external radiotherapy to the thyroid. 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 Head & Neck Radiographer  07884 073858

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists  01622 225094

Appointment enquiries  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 are also available on the Kent Oncology Centre website: www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Side effects of external radiotherapy to the thyroid

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. It is good to try to get some exercise each day, however gentle.

Loss of appetite

Some people lose their appetite as an effect of radiotherapy. A sore, dry mouth can also make eating difficult. You may also feel sick (nauseous) largely due to the thick, sticky saliva; drinking more fluids can help but do tell the radiotherapy team as medications can help to ease this.

It is often better to eat little and often and it is important to drink plenty of fluids, e.g. water, tea, coffee, squash, fruit juice, milk and soup. If you struggle to eat much, it is a good idea to supplement or replace your meals with nutritious high-calorie drinks which can be supplied initially by our dietitian and are subsequently available on prescription.

Sore throat

Your throat will probably become sore and inflamed after a couple of weeks of treatment. Your voice may also become hoarse. Swallowing food may become painful. Please tell your radiotherapy team if this happens as medications can be used to ease this. You will be advised to eat soft food and to avoid smoking, drinking spirits and eating hot or spicy foods. Drinking plenty of bland, cool fluids e.g. milk or water will help to keep your mouth moist. Speech and language therapists and dietitians are available to discuss any problems with you if they arise.

Dry mouth

You may not produce as much saliva as before treatment. The lining of your mouth and throat may become dry, making eating and speech difficult. You may notice a feeling of sticky mucous in the throat, as radiotherapy can make the saliva thick and stringy. To reduce the dry feeling, it may be helpful to use an artificial saliva spray which we can supply for you.

Although you may start to produce some saliva again within a few months of treatment, it is important to be aware that the problem might continue for some time or even permanently.

We can give you advice about coping with the long term effects of a dry mouth.

Skin changes

The skin over your neck may redden and become itchy and sore. 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 (your Macmillan radiographer can advise on this)
- Wear loose fitting natural fibre clothing next to the skin
- Men wishing to shave their face are advised to only use an electric razor or not to shave at all whilst on treatment as wet shaving can further irritate the skin
- Avoid adhesive tape
- Avoid heating and cooling pads/ice
- Avoid hair removal products
- 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 and it is advisable to apply a high factor sun screen.

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.

Still smoking?

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

Long term side effects

- Hardening of the underlying tissue in the treatment area (fibrosis)
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Please use this space to write any notes or questions you may have.



Further information and advice can be obtained from:

**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

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 01227 864314

Email: ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Cancer Research UK and 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 PALS Team. We will do our best to arrange this.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you would like to raise any concerns, make comments and suggestions or require information on Trust services, you can contact **PALS**. Office opening times are Monday to Friday 10.00am to 4.00pm. Both offices offer a 24 hour answering machine. Messages will be responded to within one working day, so please do leave a contact number.

PALS Maidstone Hospital

☎ 01622 224960

PALS Tunbridge Wells Hospital

☎ 01892 632953

PALS Email

mtwpals@nhs.net

PALS SMS

☎ 07747 782317

PALS Maidstone Fax

☎ 01622 224843

PALS Tunbridge Wells Fax

☎ 01892 632954

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