



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

After head and neck radiotherapy: what happens next

Information for patients,
relatives and carers

This information has been written to help you manage the side effect of head and neck radiotherapy. We hope you find it a useful resource. If you have any questions or concerns please speak to your clinical nurse specialist.

Side effects

Side effects from radiotherapy can get worse in the first week after completing the course of treatment as the radiotherapy continues to actively affect the tissues during this time. Healing will begin the second week after treatment ends.

Skin reaction

Your skin may get red, scabby and crack leaving an area of moist skin. This is a normal skin reaction after radiotherapy to this area.

You may have been given some Purilon Gel to apply once you have finished your radiotherapy. This is to ease discomfort.

Please continue to moisturise any areas of skin that are dry. Gently wash the area with plain water and dab dry. Avoid rubbing your neck. This is usually one of the first areas to heal after treatment.

Eating and drinking

We will encourage you to continue to eat and drink as you are able. You may only be able to manage liquids for a short while. Please follow advice given to you by the dietitian. There are no forbidden foods as maximising calories is important, but citrus, spices and dry foods may be difficult.

It is helpful to try to eat regularly throughout the day. Sometimes 6 small portions of food, rather than 3 meals can help maximise your calorie intake. You will probably be eating smaller portions than usual. Taste can be affected by the treatment, so eating becomes a chore. Saliva production is also reduced so moist foods, sauces and gravy, can make eating easier.

If you have PEG or NG tube, feeds will be delivered to your house by Abbott. We will provide you with the contact numbers for them. Any queries' please contact the dietitian on the number provided.

Pain

Your pain should be managed as per the regime given to you by your consultant team at the end of your treatment. It can take a few weeks for your pain to settle so painkillers should be reduced slowly. Your clinical nurse specialist will be available for advice.

We recommend stopping the strongest first and continuing with the others. It is not unusual to still need some form of pain relief a month after treatment.

It is important to increase the texture of foods that you are able to swallow before reducing your painkillers.

Once you have finished your radiotherapy, any repeat prescriptions will need to be obtained from your GP.

Fatigue

It is very normal to feel tired after radiotherapy. Your energy levels should improve as you heal. It is important to attempt a small amount of exercise every day, but you may need a rest in the afternoon. This can help your mental wellbeing, healing and sleep pattern.

Follow up

You will receive an appointment to be seen in the ENT Department clinic 4 weeks after your treatment.

You will be phoned by your clinical nurse specialist (CNS) weekly from the end of treatment until you are reviewed in clinic. However if you have any concerns between calls please contact your CNS, the Radiotherapy Department or Adelaide Ward as needed.

If you are struggling to maintain your weight or eating is your major concern, Laura our dietitian can also phone you.

Questions?

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact:

- Head and Neck Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists on 0118 322 8827.
- Dietitian on 0118 3227116
- Radiotherapy Department on 0118 322 8580
- Adelaide Ward on 0118 322 7472

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Written by the Head & Neck CNS Team, March 2017

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