

Managing Side Effects of Chest Radiation Therapy

*(Includes Radiation Therapy to the Lung or
Esophagus)*

In this booklet you will learn about:

- Common side effects when you receive radiation therapy to your chest
- Tips on managing these side effects
- Where to get help

Simcoe Muskoka
Regional Cancer Program



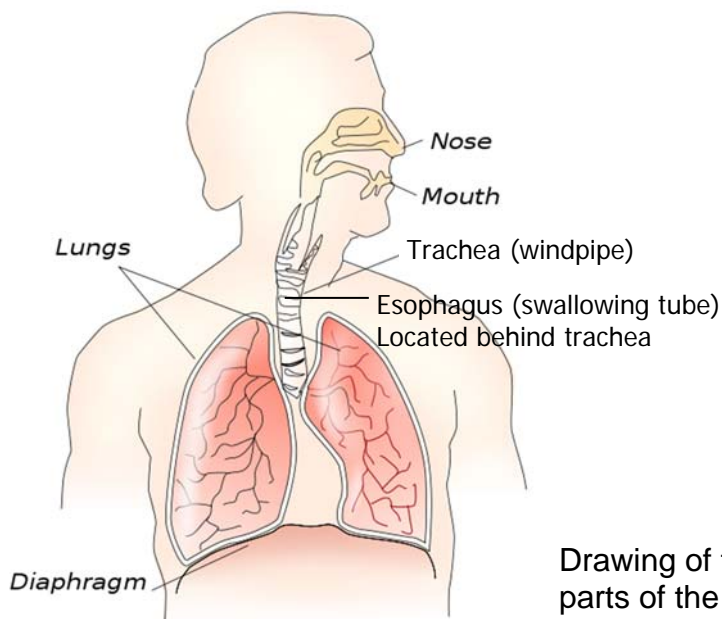
Royal Victoria
Regional Health Centre

A Cancer Care Ontario Partner



Radiation Side Effects

Side effects caused by radiation therapy to the chest (which includes radiation to the lung or esophagus (swallowing tube)) may vary from person to person. These side effects may be affected by other treatments, such as surgery, chemotherapy, and medications. In this booklet, we have listed some of the more common side effects and helpful tips to manage them. The majority of these side effects may start near the end of the second week of your radiation therapy treatments and may continue for the remainder of your treatment and for about 2-4 weeks after your treatments are complete. You may experience other side effects related to your radiation treatment that are not discussed in this pamphlet. For more information, please speak to a member of your Care Team.



Drawing of the parts of the body in the chest area.

Dry Cough

This can be due to the irritation of your trachea (windpipe) and airways.

If you are having a dry cough, things to do:

- Drink fluids throughout the day.
- Avoid cough syrup, unless approved by your Radiation Oncologist.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking, as these may cause more irritation.

If you cough up blood or develop a fever, please call the symptom support telephone service right away (see the back of this pamphlet for details). You may need to go to your nearest emergency department.



Sore Throat and Difficulty Swallowing

If the area being treated with radiation includes your esophagus, you may likely experience a sore throat and/or difficulty swallowing, pain with swallowing or a feeling that the food is getting “stuck” in your throat or chest.

Sometimes your saliva gets thicker, and you may even notice taste changes or a dry mouth. If this is making it difficult for you to eat, please talk to your Care Team. Your dietitian can help you as well.

If you are having a sore throat and/or difficulty swallowing, things you can do:

- Use sauces and gravies to make the food easier to swallow
- Choose foods with a softer texture, such as yogurt, mashed potatoes, cream soups, pudding or cooked cereal
- Eat foods at room temperature
- Eat small amounts of food more often, instead of one big meal

Things to avoid:

- Fried, spicy foods, sour or acidic foods
- Foods that are too hot or cold
- Alcohol and smoking

Skin Reactions

The skin in the treatment area reacts over time to radiation and most patients may notice changes at about the second week of treatment. At that time your skin may look slightly pink, and may start to feel dry, itchy, sensitive and/or tender. The skin reaction will be at its peak at about 10-14 days after all your treatments are complete.

How to Take Care of Your Skin During Treatment:

- Be gentle with your skin when washing; avoid scrubbing or scratching the area
- Apply Lubriderm[®] (unscented, lanolin free) or Glaxal Base[®] cream to the treatment area at least twice a day. Make sure cream is absorbed prior to treatment. Stop using the cream if your skin has started to peel and is moist-looking.
- Do not use any other creams or lotions in the area that is being treated (unless advised by your Care Team).
- Wear loose fitting clothing in the treatment area
- Please ask your Care Team about a saline compress if your skin is irritated.



Photo of Lubriderm[®] and Glaxal Base[®] Moisturizing Cream.

Skin Reactions (continued...)

Things to avoid:

- Extreme hot or cold temperatures on the skin in the treatment area (i.e. ice packs and heating pads).
- Tight or ill fitting clothes that rubs against your skin.
- Adhesive tapes or dressings in the treatment area.
- Hot tubs, saunas and chlorinated pools.
- Swimming in lakes.
- All perfumes, lotions, creams, sprays, colognes etc. in the treatment area - **except** Lubriderm[®] (unscented, lanolin free) or Glaxal Base[®] cream

Sun Safety

- Keep the treatment area out of natural or artificial sunlight during treatment and for 2-4 weeks after treatment is complete.
- Protect the treatment area from the sun by covering the area with clothing (i.e. shirts with high collars), wearing a wide brim hat or staying in the shade.
- Do not use sunscreen in the treatment area until the skin is completely healed.



After treatment is complete and your skin is completely healed, your skin in the treatment area will always be more sensitive to sunlight. You will need to protect your skin with sunscreen or keep it covered with clothing.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a general feeling of tiredness. Fatigue is a common side effect of cancer treatment. Not everyone will have fatigue, but for those who do, it is usually mild to moderate.

Fatigue can be caused by:

- The cancer
- Treatments including radiation, chemotherapy, and medications
- The travel involved in coming for treatments
- The change in your daily schedule
- The amount of sleep that you get
- Less food and/or fluid intake
- Lack of physical activity and exercise
- Pain, depression, or anxiety



Your medications may cause fatigue.

Things you can do for fatigue:

- Light exercise, such as walking
- Take frequent rests during the day
- Try a relaxing activity to reduce stress
- Drink more fluids daily to keep your body hydrated. If you have fluid restrictions, discuss this with your doctor.
- Ask family/friends for help with daily activities or chores

The tiredness may start to improve about 2 weeks after treatment is complete, depending on the cause, and may take up to a few months to resolve.



Light exercise such as walking may help with fatigue.

Help is a Phone Call Away

If you are having side effects related to your cancer treatment, please contact:



Symptom Support Telephone Service



During the day:

Monday – Friday from 8:00 am – 3:30 pm

Cancer Centre Symptom Support
705-728-9090 x79565



Evenings, weekends and holidays:

Monday – Friday from 5:00 pm – 8:00 am;
weekends and holidays 24 hours.

Bayshore CAREpath 1-877-681-3057

To cancel or change your appointment, please call
705-728-9090 x43333, Monday – Friday from 8:00 am –
4:00 pm.

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