

Palliative Radiotherapy

I. Introduction

Radiotherapy involves the use of high-energy X-rays or electron beams to destroy the tumour while trying to preserve normal tissues as far as possible. Although X-rays also affect normal cells in the area treated, their ability to recover is usually better than that of tumour cells.

II. Procedure

- You will not experience any pain during the treatment procedure.
- Before each session, our staff will make sure that you are in the correct position for treatment. You will then stay in the treatment room alone for a few minutes while radiotherapy is being delivered.
- You will be closely monitored through a closed-circuit television system. You can speak to us using the intercom if necessary.

III. Risks and Side Effects

- Side effects of radiotherapy are usually mild and short-term, which could be improved in weeks.
- Medical staff will offer appropriate treatment and assistance.

Your radiotherapy course can cause the following:

General side effects

By the second or third week of radiotherapy, the following side effects commonly appear:

1. Fatigue.
2. Dryness and redness of the irradiated skin.
3. Loss of hair in the irradiated area.

Side effects specific to the irradiated site

- Brain
Headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and somnolence.
- Head and Neck
Inflammation of oral or throat mucosa causing pain, dry mouth, change of taste, and difficulty in swallowing.

- Lung
Cough, chest pain, nausea, radiation-induced lung inflammation (uncommon).
If esophagus is included in the radiation field, inflammation of esophagus may occur, causing pain and difficulty in swallowing, poor appetite, and nausea.
- Abdomen
Nausea and vomiting, poor appetite, abdominal discomfort/pain, diarrhoea.
- Lower abdomen/ Pelvis
Abdominal cramps, diarrhea, frequent loose stool; urinary frequency, sensation of incomplete bowel emptying.
- Bone
Short term pain flare. Other side effects could happen and dependent on sites of irradiation.
- Skin/ Subcutaneous tissue
Skin redness, swelling, inflammation, dryness, hair loss.
If irradiation involved lips: lip bleeding/ulcer.
If irradiation involved eye region: loss of eye lashes, dry eye, conjunctivitis, and cataract.
- Other areas: _____
Side effects: _____

Note:

- Radiation-induced tumours may occur, but this is rare.
- The growth of irradiated areas may be affected in children.
- On rare occasions, patients may develop severe life-threatening complications due to radiotherapy and die.
- It is possible that the intended treatment outcome cannot be achieved, and the disease may not be alleviated or may recur/ progress in the future.
- Despite all precautions, unpredictable and unpreventable adverse outcomes may occur after treatment. Please kindly ensure that you understand the pros and cons of radiotherapy before deciding on undergoing the latter.

IV. Before the Treatment / Preparations Required

1. The treatment plan and radiotherapy schedule depend on the type and location of the tumour, as well as your health condition. Your doctor will discuss the details with you and explain how you can cope with the treatment side effects.
2. Sometimes skin tattooing or a special mould will be required to improve treatment accuracy.
3. Our staff will take written, photographic and radiographic records of your treatment for radiotherapy planning and future reference. These records may be used for research or scientific publications but your confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
4. Avoid applying ointment or cream on the area treated before attending your radiotherapy session. No other preparation is required unless specific instructions have been given by our staff.

Note:

- **Radiotherapy can cause teratogenicity (i.e. lead to abnormal fetal development). During radiotherapy, both male and female patients (if applicable) should use an effective method of contraception.**
- **Radiotherapy may affect the function of your pacemaker. Please let us know if you have a cardiac pacemaker.**

V. After the Treatment

1. You may feel tired or experience other side effects with radiotherapy. Please consider having a friend or relative accompanying you to the hospital if possible.
2. Our doctors will assess you on a regular basis and take appropriate measures to minimise your side effects.
3. If you feel unwell during the treatment period, please inform our staff.

VI. Follow-up

1. The time taken for recovery varies from person to person, some people can go back to work shortly after the completion of treatment.
2. After completing the whole course of radiotherapy, a follow-up appointment will be arranged to assess your response to treatment and to look out for complications. Please attend your appointment as scheduled.
3. Please ensure that you follow precisely the instructions given to you regarding medications (if applicable).

VII. Remarks

The list of complications is not exhaustive and other unforeseen complications may occasionally occur. The risk of some complications may actually be higher for certain patient groups. For further information, please contact your doctor.