

Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy: Treatment to the Chest Area

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What will happen on the day I come for my simulation markings appointment?

A CT scan will be done with you lying on your back with your arms above your head. It is important that you lie still. Your Radiation Therapists will make every effort to make you comfortable during the CT scan. They will explain every step of what they are doing. Your CT scan will be used to plan your treatments. This appointment may take about an hour.

As the last step, your Radiation Therapists may give you small tattoo markings. They will be used each treatment day to position you. After your simulation marking appointment, you may have some extra ink on your skin. It can be washed off when you get home.

How long will it be until I start my radiation treatments?

After your simulation marking appointment, you will usually wait a few weeks before your treatments start as it takes time to create your individual treatment plan. You will be notified of the start date for your radiation treatment as soon as your treatment plan is completed, and a time has been booked for the radiation treatment machine. Every effort will be made to start your treatments as soon as possible.

What side effects will I have during the radiation treatments?

In general, radiation to the chest area causes mild to moderate side effects. Side effects can appear midway through the course of your radiation treatments and peak 1 or 2 weeks after the treatments are finished. Usually these side effects go away over the next 4-8 weeks. If you have questions during your treatments, please ask a member of your Radiation Treatment Team.

Common side effects include:

1. Fatigue (Tiredness)

- Levels of fatigue can vary from patient to patient. You may be more tired than normal after usual activity and may need a nap or rest after each treatment.
- For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet, Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue:
<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/nshccp4030>

2. Skin Reaction

- Skin reactions are uncommon but possible. Your skin in the treatment area may become dry and itchy or pink. Some patients may have increased darkening of the skin (hyperpigmentation). Skin reactions may happen on the front, back or sides of your body.
- You are allowed to wash and bathe. Your tattoo marks will not wash off. Try not to scratch or rub the affected area.

- For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet, Skin Care During Radiation Therapy: <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSCCP1237>

3. Difficulty swallowing

- Radiation to the chest area may cause some irritation of your esophagus (the tube through which food passes when we swallow). You may feel you have heartburn or a “lump” in your esophagus. You may have pain or difficulty swallowing certain foods.
- For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet titled Esophagitis During Radiation Therapy: <https://www.nshealth.ca/sites/default/files/documents/pamphlets/nshccp4016.pdf>

What can I do if I am having trouble swallowing?

Foods that you should eat	Foods that you should avoid
Soups (warm not hot)	Toast, dry cereal
Yogurt	Crackers, cookies, cake
Soft eggs (poached, scrambled)	Raw vegetables
Pasta	Popcorn, nuts, potato chips
Milk and milk shakes	Regular meats (especially dry, coarse, and stringy meats)
Puddings, custards	Tart or acidic foods
Canned fruits	Citrus juices: orange, grapefruit, tangerine
Well cooked or mashed vegetables	Spicy foods (pizza, chili)
Juices: apple, pear, peach	
Chopped meats with gravy	

- Try eating smaller amounts of food more often.
- Do not drink alcohol, as it will irritate your throat.
- Choose bland foods. Highly seasoned foods and acidic foods may irritate your throat.
- Choose foods that are warm (not hot) and cool (not cold). Foods at extreme temperatures can cause irritation.
- Drinking liquids with meals may be helpful, especially if you are having a hard time with swallowing or are having a burning sensation with eating food. Try sipping on liquids between bites of solid foods.
- Your Radiation Oncologist may prescribe a special liquid that can help you eat and swallow more easily. It helps by reducing the pain in your throat.

4. Cough

- You may find you cough more. This may be either a dry cough or a cough with more mucous/phlegm. The cough is caused by irritation of the lung or airways.
- If you have a lot of phlegm, make sure you are drinking enough fluids to keep the mucous thin so you may cough it up more easily.
- You may try sleeping with your head elevated. As well, you may find it helpful to use a humidifier, especially in the bedroom at night.

If you are experiencing any of these side effects, please let any member of your cancer care team know.

How will the treatments affect my sexuality?

Most people with cancer (and their partners) experience a number of physical, emotional, and practical changes. These changes can happen during treatment and recovery and may affect your sexual health. There may be changes in how you feel that may affect how you respond sexually. Reactions of a partner can also add to how you see yourself as a sexual being. You may notice periods of time during treatment and recovery when you have little interest in sex. This may be upsetting to you and your partner. You may have worries (about your cancer, treatments, and how the illness is affecting your life) and these can affect both your own and your partner's interest in and enjoyment of sex.

If you are single, you may have different worries and challenges, such as how to talk about sexuality and cancer with a new partner.

Throughout this resource there are links to other helpful documents that will give you more information about specific topics. Please visit <https://www.nshealth.ca/cancer-care-program> to visit our patient education library.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the information in this educational pamphlet, please discuss them with your radiation treatment team at your next appointment.

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here:

<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources>

Find our cancer patient videos here: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/cancereducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only.

It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.