How will radiation therapy affect my daily living?

- You may continue your usual work and activities but you may experience some tiredness near the end of your course of treatment and in the weeks following.
- Unless otherwise advised you may eat and drink normally. Alcohol consumption in moderation is permitted and you can continue to take any prescribed medications.

Common questions

What happens after my treatment is finished?

- Your follow up arrangements will be discussed and organised by your treating team prior to completing treatment.

When do the side-effects settle?

- The treatment keeps on working even though you have stopped coming in for treatment. Therefore the symptoms may get a little worse before they get better. Generally the side-effects will have settled within two to four weeks of finishing your treatment course.

Remember:

Experienced staff members are available to help you. Please do not hesitate to ask for advice.

Contact details:

Epworth Richmond
Level 4, Epworth Centre
32 Erin Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002
Ph: +61 3 9936 8226

Epworth Freemasons
166 Clarendon Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002
Ph: +61 3 9483 3331
Radiation Therapy is the use of radiation to destroy cancer cells

- It works because cancer cells are more sensitive to radiation than normal cells. When a small dose of radiation is given each day over several weeks, normal cells can recover from radiation but cancer cells cannot.
- Radiation Therapy is often given to patients who have cancers that arise in the abdomen (primary cancers) or have spread to the abdominal region (metastases).
- Radiation therapy can be used with the aim to cure a cancer or it may be given with the aim to relieve symptoms.
- Radiation Therapy can be used in conjunction with other types of treatment such as Surgery or Chemotherapy or a combination of all of these treatment options.

What are the possible side effects?

Side effects of Radiation Therapy are predictable in most patients, depending on your treatment site, the dose being given, the number of treatments and your general health. Reactions may begin to occur within the second or third week of treatment.

- **Skin reaction**— The degree of reaction varies from person to person. If you are having five to ten treatments, skin reaction may occur in the week following the completion of your radiation therapy. For longer treatment plans reaction may begin two to three weeks from start of treatment. Your skin may become red and irritated. Follow advice given and contact the Nursing staff by phone for further support should you require it. The skin will recover usually two to three weeks following the completion of treatment.
- **Fatigue**—you may become increasingly tired as you progress through to the end of your treatment. This is a normal reaction to the Radiation Therapy and each person is affected with varying degrees. Finding a balance between rest and activity will help you cope with this side-effect.
- **Pain and discomfort**— the Nursing staff will give you information about pain control and your Doctor will write prescriptions if required. It is important that you follow the pain control instructions, as this will ensure that you are comfortable and best equipped to complete the radiation treatment.
- **Pain flare** - Radiation Therapy to “bone areas” can cause a temporary increase in pain in the area being treated; it usually last 12 -36 hours. Nurses will discuss the use of additional “breakthrough” analgesia and your Doctor will write prescriptions if required.
- **Difficulty swallowing**— is a common reaction when the throat is in the treatment area. As a result of inflammation, the throat may feel painful when swallowing or produce a sensation like a ‘lump in the throat’. Early assessment by your Doctor and Nursing staff can assist in alleviating your discomfort.

Dietary changes may be required. Nurses will discuss with you in detail any changes that are necessary. These may include soft moist food, avoiding salty/spicy foods and alcohol consumption. Dietary supplements such as Ensure/Sustagen may be recommended.

**Dry mouth**— Will be discussed if this is likely. It is suggested that you have a bottle of water with you and sip regularly to keep your mouth moist and comfortable. Mouth moisturising gels and sprays are available—check with the Nursing staff for appropriate products. DO NOT USE mouth washes that contain alcohol or have strong astringent flavours.

If you experience any of the above symptoms please report to the Nursing staff for advice and support. These side-effects are manageable.

How can I manage my skin while on treatment?

- You will be recommended a skin moisturizer to use during treatment. At the start of treatment apply the cream to the area being treated TWICE A DAY. Pat cream on – do not rub briskly
- Do not use cosmetics, perfumes or other lotions on the treated area once you commence radiotherapy.
- Avoid exposure of the treated skin to excessive temperatures including direct sunlight, heat packs, ice packs, saunas or hot spas during the course of your radiotherapy
- Avoid shaving with a blade—electric shavers are best for skin care.

This information is designed to inform you and your family/carers about Radiation Therapy.

It aims to give you some idea of what to expect during and after your treatment, and we hope to relieve any concerns you may have. It does not replace discussion with the health professionals involved in your care, and we encourage you to discuss questions and concerns with us at any time during your treatment.