How can I manage my skin while on therapy?

- You will be recommended a skin moisturiser to use during treatment. At the start of treatment you are to apply the cream to the area being treated TWICE A DAY, but as treatment progresses you may need to apply the cream three to four times per day. If changes to your skin occur in the treatment area, inform the Nursing staff as you may need to use a different cream.
- You may wash the skin that is being treated with warm water and a mild un-perfumed soap. Pat the skin dry—do not rub.
- 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.
- A wide brimmed soft hat should be worn at all times when outdoors.

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

Can I wash the marks off my skin?

- We ask that you don’t deliberately wash them off as this may further irritate your skin. The Radiation Therapists will re-apply them each day as required.

What happens after my treatment is finished?

- Your follow up arrangements will be discussed and organized 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 three 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 people who have cancer that arise in the chest (primary cancers) or have spread to the chest or thorax (metastases). Cancers such as lung cancer, cancer of the oesophagus and some lymphomas.
- 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 with other types of treatment, such as surgery or chemotherapy, or a combination of all of these.
- Whilst attending for a course of radiation therapy you will have scheduled reviews with your Radiation Oncologist in the treatment department. Nursing staff will schedule weekly reviews to monitor your progress and assist with any problems related to your treatment.

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. After two or three weeks of treatment your skin may become red and irritated. Towards the end of the treatment the reaction can become more intense and you may experience some superficial skin loss requiring simple dressings until the area heals. The Nursing staff will teach you how to care for this skin reaction. Occasionally this skin reaction will occur in the week following the completion of your radiation therapy. Contact the Nursing staff by phone for advice and support should this occur. The skin will recover and may take up 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.
- Taste Change - Radiation Therapy to the head and neck region may result in change or loss of taste. This is usually a temporary problem and changes should slowly resolve after treatment has finished, although this can sometimes take a couple of months.
- Dry mouth - Is due to a reduction in the flow of saliva and may occur as early as the first two weeks of treatment. The saliva can become thick and sticky or cease to flow altogether. It is suggested that you have a bottle of water with you and sip regularly to make your mouth feel moist and comfortable. Dry mouth moisturising gels and sprays are available—check with the Nursing staff for appropriate products.
- Mouth ulcers (mucositis) - If you’re lower face is in the treatment area the inside of your mouth may become sore as a result of inflammation and ulceration of the lining of the mouth. It is important to follow the mouth care advice from the commencement of your treatment and Nursing staff will monitor the condition of your mouth during the treatment course.
- Thrush (oral) - Is a common side effect. It can appear as a coating on the tongue or white spots on the lining of the mouth. Report any changes to the Nursing staff for simple measures to manage thrush.
- 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.
- Difficulty swallowing— Is a common reaction when the throat is in the treatment area. As a result of inflammation of the throat this can feel painful when swallowing or produce a sensation like a ‘lump in the throat’. Early assessment by your Doctor and Nursing staff may help to prevent the progression of swallowing difficulties.

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

Mouthcare

It is important to keep your mouth clean and moist to prevent infection and ease discomfort.

From the commencement of treatment:
- Gentle cleaning of teeth with a soft toothbrush.
- Rinse mouth after every meal with sodium bicarbonate (sodi-bic) mouthwash
- SODI-BIC MOUTHWASH RECIPE (Make up daily)
  - 1 tablespoon sodi-bic
  - 1 teaspoon salt
  - 4 cups of water

Dental care is important before, during and after radiation therapy treatment to the head and neck region. Your Radiation Oncologist may ask you to see a dentist prior to treatment to assess your teeth and prepare them for Radiation Therapy. Dentures may also need to be adjusted to avoid irritation to the gums and mouth. If you go to a dentist any time after Radiation Therapy has been given always inform them that you have had radiation therapy.