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 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 people who have cancers that arise in, or have spread to the pelvic spine from other sites (metastases).
- Radiation Therapy may also 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.

- **Skin reaction**—The degree of reaction varies from person to person. After two or three weeks from start of treatment, your skin may become red and irritated. This means if you are having only five to ten treatments the skin reaction may occur in the week following the completion of your radiation therapy. Follow advice given and contact the Nursing staff by phone for further support should you require it. The skin will recover usually within two to three weeks following the completion of treatment.

- **Fatigue**: you may become increasingly tired as you progress toward 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.

- **Difficulty swallowing**—is a common reaction when the oesophagus is in the treatment area. As a result of inflammation, you may feel pain when swallowing or a sensation like a ‘lump in the central chest area’. Early assessment by your Doctor and Nursing staff can assist in alleviating your discomfort. It is suggested that you have a bottle of water with you and sip regularly to keep oesophagus moist. 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.

- **Nausea and vomiting**—Dependent upon the treatment area (in relation to the stomach), nausea and or vomiting may occur. If this is likely, your Doctor may give you a prescription for an anti-nausea tablet. You may be required to take this prior to treatment for your comfort. Nursing staff will advise.

- **Bowel Changes**—Dependent upon the treatment area, you may develop more frequent soft/loose bowel motions. Bowel actions may take approximately two weeks to settle. Please report any early bowel changes to Nursing staff or your Doctor. Dietary changes or medication may be required to relieve discomfort.

- **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, which may include pre-treatment analgesia, to ensure your comfort.

- **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 a prescription if required.

How can I manage my skin while on treatment?

- You may wash the skin that is being treated with warm water and a mild non-perfumed soap. Pat the skin dry—do not rub.
- Do not use talcum powder in the treatment area.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes. Loose cotton T-shirts or singlets are best.
- 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.