



RADIATION THERAPY

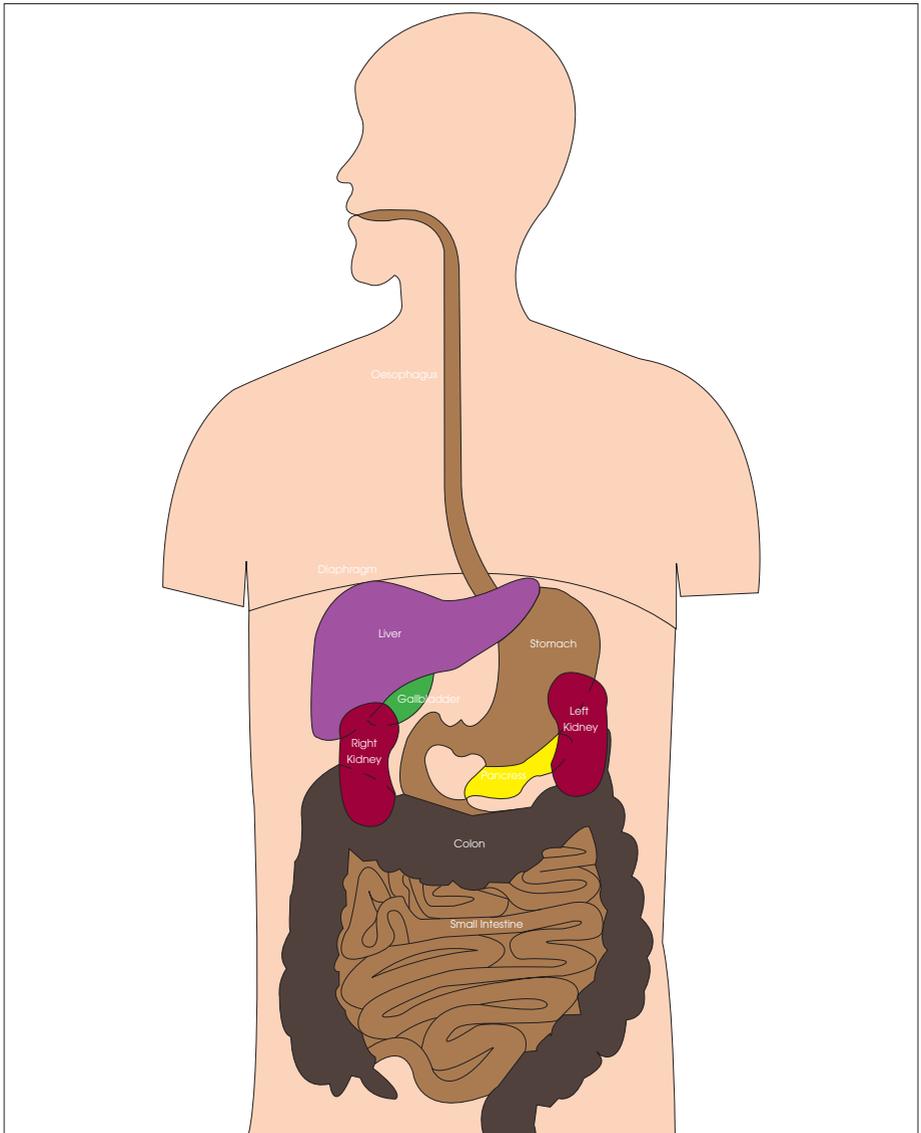
Abdomen/Oesophagus

Regional Cancer Treatment Service (RCTS)
Radiation Oncology Department



RADIATION THERAPY TO THE ABDOMEN/OESOPHAGUS

A course of radiation to the abdomen can vary from 2-6 1/2 weeks.



**Continue to take your usual medications,
eat a normal diet and drink plenty of fluids.**

SIDE EFFECTS

Radiation therapy can result in side effects that develop during treatment and continue for a few weeks after treatment finishes. These are known as acute side effects. You can also develop side effects many months to years after treatment; these are known as late side effects.

The side effects and their severity will vary for each person. Radiation therapy side effects are localised to the area being treated, with the exception of fatigue. Side effects will vary depending on the area within the abdomen/oesophagus being treated. You will not necessarily experience all of the side effects mentioned.

Your radiation oncologist will discuss with you which side effects may occur.

ACUTE SIDE EFFECTS

These commonly start in the 2nd - 3rd week of your treatment and continue for a few weeks after your treatment finishes.

SIDE EFFECTS	CARE
<p>FATIGUE: It is common to feel tired and have a reduction in energy levels because of the treatment. This may start a few days into treatment and it can vary in its severity. It is a very individual response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get plenty of rest/sleep when possible. You may find light exercise helpful to increase your energy levels. However, understand that you may not be up to doing as much as usual.
<p>NAUSEA AND VOMITING: You may be aware of feeling sick shortly after your treatment each day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Before your treatment course begins, you may be given a prescription for anti-sickness medication. It is important that you follow the instructions on the medication for it to be effective.• If you begin to feel sick during your treatment and do not have any anti-sickness medication, please let the radiation therapists know and they can arrange for you to be seen by the nurse and/or radiation oncologist.

SIDE EFFECTS	CARE
<p>SMALL BOWEL AND LARGE BOWEL: You may develop some diarrhoea or colic pains/cramping during your treatment. Appetite can decrease and you may be aware of losing weight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you develop any of these side effects, please let your radiation oncologist or the radiation therapy nurses know. Medications may be prescribed to help these symptoms and dietitian referral arranged.
<p>SKIN: Your skin in the treatment area can become slightly pink and tender during your treatment, like a mild sunburn. Remember that this may occur on your back as well as your stomach. Later in your treatment, it may become dry and itchy. If this occurs, please let your radiation oncologist or nurse know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bathe or shower as you normally would, but be gentle with your skin in the treatment area. • Before applying anything to the treatment area, check with your radiation therapist or doctor. • Do not use any harsh products such as exfoliants or loofahs in the treatment area. • When drying the skin in the treated area, do not rub your skin with a towel but gently pat it dry. • Do not wear any tight fitting clothes around the treatment area as this can chafe your skin. • Avoid exposing your treatment area to the sun as it is very sensitive during radiation therapy and will burn very easily. You should ensure that the treated area is well protected from the sun for approximately one year after radiation. As part of good skin care, you should always ensure all of your skin is adequately protected against the sun.

LATE SIDE EFFECTS

These can take many months to years to develop, and you may never develop these side effects. The benefit of receiving radiation therapy, as part of your cancer management, is felt to outweigh the potential longterm risks of the treatment. If you have any concerns in relation to these side effects, please discuss them with your radiation oncologist.

POTENTIAL LATE SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE

SMALL BOWEL AND LARGE BOWEL:

Some patients may experience an alteration in their bowel habit after radiation therapy. This can mean passing bowel motions or wind more frequently than they did before radiation therapy. Very occasionally the radiation therapy may cause scarring of the bowel, which can result in narrowing of the bowel or a blockage. If there is a concern you may be developing a bowel obstruction, you will be referred to a surgeon for assessment.

LIVER, KIDNEYS, AND SPINAL CORD:

These organs are very sensitive to radiation therapy so any treatment to the abdomen is carefully planned to ensure these organs receive a radiation dose that is safe.

SECOND MALIGNANCY:

Very rarely, more than 10–20 years after radiation therapy, another cancer can develop at the treated site due to the radiation therapy. The risk of another cancer developing is extremely low in comparison to the benefit of treating your cancer now. If you have any concerns regarding this issue, your radiation oncologist will be happy to discuss them with you.

REDUCING SIDE EFFECTS

There are some measures you can take that can help to reduce the severity of some of the acute side effects.

TRY TO STOP SMOKING

Smoking during radiation therapy increases the sensitivity of your body to the side effects of radiation and will result in more severe reactions. If possible, try to stop smoking before your radiation therapy starts and for the duration of your treatment course. We would strongly advise you to stop smoking permanently in view of the serious health problems caused by smoking, including throat and lung cancer. If you need help in giving up, the radiation oncology team can give contact details of support services to help with this aim.

AVOID ALCOHOL

Drinking alcohol during your radiation therapy will increase your pain on swallowing and increase your radiation reaction in the oesophagus . Avoid alcohol throughout your radiation therapy and until your radiation reaction has settled. We would advise only minimal to moderate alcohol intake once you have recovered from treatment.

DIET

During radiation therapy to the abdomen, we would advise you not to eat heavily spiced food or a high fibre diet as these foods could increase your bowel frequency. We have a dietician service available if you need advice.

FURTHER INFORMATION

CONTRACEPTION

For women receiving radiation therapy, we recommend that you do not get pregnant while receiving radiation therapy as radiation can be damaging to a developing baby. We advise you use contraception during sexual intercourse if there is a chance pregnancy could occur.

AFTER TREATMENT IS FINISHED

At the end of your radiation therapy course, you will be advised regarding follow-up. If you have any concerns about side effects following treatment, please phone the contact number on your discharge form. If you do not have a contact number, phone the radiation therapy nurses on (06) 350 8438.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

The radiation oncology team are here to help you through your cancer therapy journey. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to approach any one of our team members. You will see the radiation therapists at each of your treatment appointments, and nurses may be seen when necessary. Routinely during your treatment, you will see the radiation oncologist or registrar who will check how you are managing with treatment and its side effects.

CONTACT US

Radiation Oncology reception (06) 350 8430

NOTES

FEEDBACK

We encourage feedback and assurance is given that comments will not adversely affect your current or future care.

You can do this:

- through discussion with MidCentral Health staff providing your care
- by completing “Tell us what you think...” pamphlets available from all services
- by contacting our Customer Relations Co-ordinator, PO Box 2056, Palmerston North 4440, or phone (06) 350 8980
- by contacting a Health and Disability Commissioner Advocate, phone 0800 112 233.