



RADIATION THERAPY

Lung/Chest/Oesophagus

Regional Cancer Treatment Service (RCTS)
Radiation Oncology Department

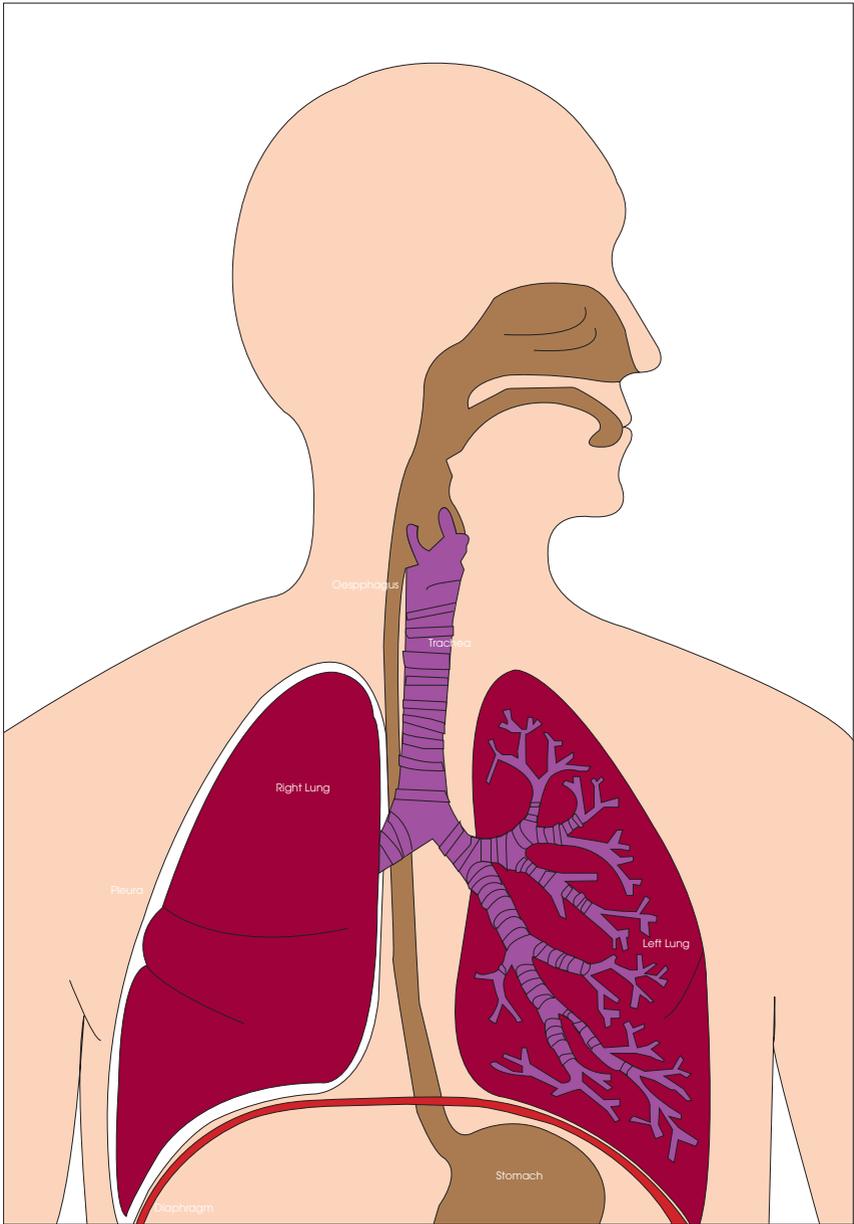


RADIATION THERAPY TO THE LUNG/CHEST/OESOPHAGUS

Radiation therapy to the chest is either radical or palliative. Radical radiation therapy indicates that your treatment is aimed at gaining long-term control of your cancer and may have a small chance of cure.

In cases of large tumour size or when cancer has spread to other areas, it is not possible to deliver radical treatment and therefore palliative radiation therapy is delivered. Palliative treatment is given to improve your symptoms in the chest due to the cancer and slow down tumour growth.

The length of your radiation therapy course depends on the aim of your treatment. Radical treatment courses are usually 4-7 weeks in length. Palliative treatment courses may be a single treatment to the chest or up to 2-3 weeks of treatment.



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. You will not necessarily experience all the side effects mentioned.

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>SKIN: Your skin over the area treated can become slightly pink and tender during your treatment, like a mild sunburn. 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.

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>COUGH: This can occur due to irritation of your main airways during treatment. The cough is usually dry and tickly. It often improves a few weeks after completion of your treatment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your radiation oncologist can prescribe a cough suppressant if required.
<p>OESOPHAGITIS This side effect is due to inflammation of your oesophagus (gullet) caused by the radiation. It results in your oesophagus feeling painful when you swallow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you develop this symptom, please let the nurses or radiation oncologist know as medicines can be prescribed to improve your symptoms. • It is often easier to eat a soft diet if you are suffering from oesophagitis because bulky foods, such as bread and meat, may give you pain on swallowing. If you are struggling with eating, there is a dietitian available to discuss your eating options, and provide supplements if necessary.
<p>NAUSEA: This is not a common side effect when treating your chest with radiation therapy. However if your stomach is in the radiation field you may be aware of feeling sick shortly after your treatment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this is the case, let the nurses or radiation oncologist know as they can advise on appropriate anti-sickness treatments.
<p>HAIR LOSS: You will not lose the hair on your head if you are receiving radiation therapy to your chest. However, if you are male, you may lose your chest hair in the area that is being treated. It may or may not grow back in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no treatment for this. Your radiation oncologist will inform you whether this hair loss is likely to be permanent or not.

SIDE EFFECTS	CARE
<p>PNEUMONITIS: This is an inflammatory process in the area of lung treated due to radiation. The main symptoms of pneumonitis is increased breathlessness. It may develop at the end of treatment or in the first few months after radiation therapy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your radiation oncologist may prescribe a medication for this if necessary.

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 long-term risks of this treatment. If you have any concerns in relation to these side effects, please discuss them with your radiation oncologist.

POTENTIAL LATE SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE
<p>LUNG FIBROSIS: Lung fibrosis or lung scarring can develop in the areas of lung receiving radiation therapy. We aim to treat the smallest amount of normal lung possible to reduce the risk of any long term side effects. If side effects do develop, it usually means you feel more breathless on exercise or sometimes at rest. Your radiation oncologist will discuss with you if it is thought this will effect you significantly.</p>
<p>OESOPHAGEAL STRICTURE: If your oesophagus (gullet) receives a dose of radiation during your radiation therapy, it may, in some cases, become scarred and narrow many months after your treatment. If this occurs, your radiation oncologist can refer you for a procedure to stretch your oesophagus open.</p>
<p>SPINAL CORD DAMAGE: This is a very rare side effect as your radiation therapy is very carefully planned to avoid damage to your spinal cord. If damage does occur, this takes many months to develop and can result in weakness and reduced sensation in your legs.</p>
<p>HEART DAMAGE: Modern radiation therapy planning techniques minimise the dose received by your heart when treating the lower left lung. However if a significant area of the heart receives radiation therapy there is a risk it could cause heart damage in the years after treatment, resulting in an increased risk of heart disease. Your radiation oncologist will advise you if this is a risk for you.</p>

REDUCING SIDE EFFECTS

There are some simple measures you can take which can help 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 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. We would strongly advise you to stop smoking permanently in view of the serious health problems caused by smoking, including 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

Continue eating a healthy, well-balanced diet for as long as possible during your treatment. It is likely that you will see a dietitian during your treatment. The dietitian offers advice about appropriate diet options, supplements, and weight maintenance.

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

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.