

## 'DON'Ts' for the treatment area

Please avoid...



### Oesophagitis

The oesophagus (food pipe) can become inflamed or irritated during radiation therapy. Not all patients will experience this.

#### Signs to look out for include:

- weight loss
- pain when eating and drinking – odynophagia
- difficulty swallowing – dysphagia
- heartburn
- acidic taste in the back of the throat
- changes in taste
- Infections
- nausea and vomiting
- bleeding (rare)

If you experience any of these side effects please let your treatment team know.

#### What can I do to manage this?

Regular pain medication can be recommended by your doctor or nurse

- Pain killers such as paracetamol
- Local anaesthetic sprays or liquids for your throat/mouth

#### Diet changes:

- Eat small frequent meals
- Aid digestion by sitting upright after eating
- Eat a balanced diet and ensure you're drinking plenty of fluids
- Soft/moist foods such as rice, mashed potato, scrambled eggs and yogurt. Utilise gravies and sauces.

#### Avoid:

- Crunchy, acidic and spicy foods
- Food and drink that are very hot or cold
- Alcohol and sour juices

**We have a dietitian who can offer advice and assist you during your Radiotherapy.**

#### Pain and swelling

Some swelling can occur in the treatment area causing discomfort or pain. Take pain relief such as paracetamol as required. Discuss with your treatment team if the pain continues while taking paracetamol.

#### References

SCOR—The Society and College of Radiographers, 2021. <https://www.sor.org/news/scor-updates-radiation-dermatitis-guidelines>

#### Illustrated panels from the above reference

eviQ – Patients and Carers, patient information sheets, managing side effects, Oesophagitis, ID: 1929 v.3, last reviewed 7 December 2018, eviQ Cancer Treatments Online, Cancer Institute NSW, viewed 18 February 2021, <https://www.eviq.org.au/patients-and-carers/patient-information-sheets/managing-side-effects/1929-oesophagitis-inflammation-of-the-food-pipe>

# Radiation Therapy to the Axilla: Side Effects Overview

Radiation therapy can cause side effects in your treatment area which can vary from patient to patient. The Radiation Oncologist will have discussed the possible short and long term side effects with you during the consent process.

This brochure explains the short term side effects. These symptoms can begin during a course of radiation therapy and may even peak 1-2 weeks after a treatment course is complete. They should have settled around 6 weeks after treatment.

The oncology nurses will see you on day one or two of your treatment to discuss any concerns or questions you have. Further assessments can be arranged at this time.

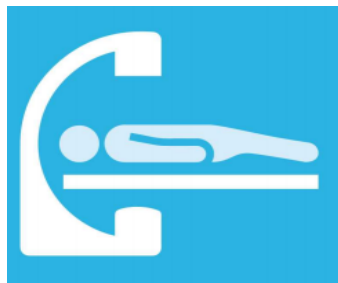
Haere Mai Welcome | Manaaki Respect  
Tūhono Together | Angamua Aim High

## Most Common Side Effects

- Fatigue
- Skin reactions
- Oesophagitis (Inflamed or irritated food pipe)
- Pain and swelling

## We're here to help!

Every day a radiation therapist will ask how you are. Please do not hesitate to voice any concerns. If you're experiencing any of these side effects (not limited to this list), we can refer you to our oncology nurses to discuss further.



## Contacts

Regional Blood and Cancer Service  
Building 8, Level 4, Auckland City Hospital  
Auckland DHB  
Phone: 09 307 4949  
Reception ext 22631  
Nurses ext 22837  
Acute Oncology ext 23826 (Mon-Fri 8-4pm)

## Fatigue

There are many contributing factors that will cause tiredness:

- The effect of treatment on normal cells
- Stress related to your illness
- Daily travel to treatment
- Balancing life outside your treatment.

## Suggestions:

- Ensure you're eating a balanced diet (additional supplements are **not** recommended, unless prescribed by your oncology team)
- Drink plenty of fluids (unless on fluid restrictions)
- Rest and gentle exercise (e.g walking)
- Practice self care (personal techniques that help you relax)
- Accept help from others.

## Skin Reactions

Due to receiving treatment where your skin folds (armpit) you are likely to see it redden and peel over time. This is because this area is warm, moist and rubs together, making the skin more sensitive.

This may not happen straight away but tends to develop gradually throughout treatment. It usually starts to settle 2-4 weeks after treatment finishes.



gradually become  
pinker or darker



feel dry or  
tight, and sore



develop a rash  
and feel itchy



blister or peel

## Skin care advice

Skin reactions can't be prevented however there are things you can do to help yourself feel more comfortable. Tell your radiation therapist or nurse about your skin care routine. They will let you know if any changes are advised.



**you may**

go swimming if your skin is **NOT**  
blistered or peeling

It is best to shower immediately afterwards to wash off the chlorine and then apply moisturiser. Please stop swimming if it irritates your skin



**you may**

find it more comfortable to wear  
loose-fitting clothing



**please avoid**

sun exposure and protect the  
area from direct sunlight

**Note: Please do not use sunscreen during treatment**

## Hygiene and moisturising

- Our nurses will give you a moisturiser to use during treatment. If you have a preferred one please bring it in to show our nurses
- Use the moisturiser a few times daily. Do not apply immediately before your treatment
- Please stop using it if your skin becomes irritated, blisters or peels
- **Please do not use deodorant under your treated armpit**



## washing and bathing

Make sure the water is not too hot; wash the skin gently with products you would normally use and gently pat dry