

Radiation Therapy to the Abdomen: 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.

Pain and swelling

Some swelling can occur in the treatment area. Take pain relief such as paracetamol as required. Discuss with your treatment team if the pain is no longer managed.

Skin Reactions

Treatment to your abdomen isn't often associated with an advanced skin reaction. Reddening of the skin in the treatment area is possible. It will not happen straight away but tends to develop gradually throughout treatment and 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

Skin reactions can't be prevented, however there are things you can do to help 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 required. 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.


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

'DON'Ts' for the treatment area

Please avoid...

-  rubbing the area
-  using sticky tape
-  using wax, cream or lasers

Contacts

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

References

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

Illustrated panels from the above reference

2. eviQ - Clinical resources, Side Effect and Toxicity Management, gastrointestinal, last reviewed 7 December 2018, eviQ Cancer Treatments Online, Cancer Institute NSW, <https://www.eviq.org.au/clinical-resources/side-effect-and-toxicity-management/gastrointestinal>

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

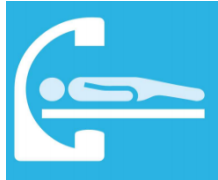
Most Common Side Effects

- Fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite/weightloss
- Dyspepsia (Indigestion)
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Pain and swelling
- Skin reactions.

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.

An oncology dietitian is available to assist you with weight and eating concerns.



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 (walking)
- Practice self care (personal techniques that help you relax)
- Accept help from others.

Nausea and Vomiting

This can occur within the first few hours to days after treatment.

How to manage this:

- A Doctor can prescribe anti sickness medication
- Acupressure bands on your wrists
- Diet changes— a dietitian can become involved.

Eating	Drinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• eat small meals 5 or 6 times a day• eat slowly and chew your food well• eat cold or warm food (not hot)• don't cook meals when you feel sick• let someone else do the cooking• don't eat very sweet, fried, fatty or spicy foods, or foods with a strong smell• try peppermints or peppermint tea• try foods with ginger in them, e.g. ginger biscuits or ginger beer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• have plenty of water during the day (unless you are fluid restricted)• drink water slowly in small sips• don't drink a lot before meals• don't drink alcohol• don't have drinks with caffeine in them

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What if you keep vomiting?

When you vomit you lose fluids and this can cause dehydration:

- Ensure you keep up your fluid intake (unless on fluid restrictions)
- Seek help from your radiation therapists and oncology nurses

Loss of appetite / weight loss

It is important for you to not lose weight during treatment.

Adjusting your diet can assist with this, try eating small and more frequent meals every few hours.

Our oncology dietitian can assist you with this.

Dyspepsia—Indigestion

You may experience a feeling of bloating, heartburn and belching (feeling of fullness).

Please speak to the team for advice. The nurses can advise antacids to relieve the heartburn sensation.

Note - It is also important to tell us whether you could be constipated.

Diarrhoea

Radiotherapy can damage the lining of your gut. This reduces the amount of water and nutrients that can move from the gut into the body. Extra water in the gut causes loose and watery bowel motions.

What can we do to help?

- Low fibre diet—ask the team for information on this
- Try small frequent meals every few hours
- Ensure you drink plenty of fluids (unless on fluid restrictions)
- Medicine to stop / reduce diarrhoea

Constipation

This is less common than diarrhoea, however if this does occur you must make the treatment team aware and be assessed by the nurses.