



## Ways to Manage Side Effects: Head & Neck Radiotherapy

High energy X-ray can kill or slow the growth of cancer cells, but the nearby healthy tissues will also be affected. Damage to healthy tissues can cause side effects. The type and degree of side effects depend mainly on the radiation dose prescribed and the area of treatment. Side effects do not usually happen immediately but may develop and persist or even worsen over the course of treatment. After completion of treatment, the possible side effects induced by radiation will gradually subside.

### Possible Side Effects of Radiotherapy:

1. Fatigue
2. Skin reaction
  - Reddening or darkening of the skin
  - Sensitive, tender, dry, itchy, and sore
  - Peeling or blistering
3. Hair loss
4. Dry mouth
5. Change of taste
6. Stiffness in the jaw
7. Sore throat, mouth, and gum sores
8. Hoarseness
9. Difficulty in swallowing
10. Loss of appetite
11. Hearing impairment

### Management of the Side Effects:

#### Skin Care

1. Keep the skin of the treatment area dry and clean. Wash the skin with warm water and mild non-perfumed body wash or shampoo. Gently pat dry the skin using a soft towel.
2. Try to keep the radiotherapy markings on your skin. Do not redraw by yourself if they have faded or get blurred. Please tell your radiation therapist if this happens.
3. Do not use hot water, heating pads or ice pads over the treatment area.
4. No bathing, swimming, taking a sauna to reduce irritation to the skin.
5. Do not use non-prescribed cream, lotions, perfume, powder, or deodorants over the treatment area.
6. Avoid rubbing, scrubbing, or scratching the treatment area.
7. Keep fingernails short to protect your skin from accidental scratching.
8. Avoid shaving treated skin. Use electrical shavers if necessary.
9. Wear loose collar clothing to avoid friction to the treatment area.
10. Avoid exposing the treatment area to direct sunlight by wearing a hat or using an umbrella.

#### Others

1. Get plenty of rest to restore energy.
2. Drink water frequently to keep your mouth moist.
3. Try small frequent meals to improve appetite. Take meal supplements to maintain nutrition if needed.
4. Avoid alcohol and irritating food such as spicy and salty food.
5. Consume liquid or soft food or cut your food into small pieces. Eat small bites slowly and carefully.
6. Maintain good oral hygiene. Use soft-haired toothbrush and mouthwash suggested by your doctor.
7. Exercise your jaw regularly to reduce stiffness.

For any enquiries, please contact your oncologist or our healthcare professionals.