



**Barwon
Health**

CHEST TREATMENT INFORMATION BOOKLET

Department of Radiation Oncology

Cancer Services
University Hospital Geelong

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Below: The Andrew Love Cancer Centre located at University Hospital Geelong (Swanston Street entrance). Open 8am - 5pm.



WHAT IS RADIOTHERAPY?

Radiotherapy is the use of radiation to destroy cancer cells. It works because cancer cells are more sensitive to radiation than normal cells. If a small dose of radiation is given each day over several weeks, normal cells recover from radiation but cancer cells cannot.

Radiotherapy is often given to people who have cancers that arise in the chest (primary cancers) or have spread to the chest or thorax (metastases). The common conditions for which radiotherapy is given are lung cancer, cancer of the oesophagus (gullet) and for the treatment of some lymphomas.

Radiotherapy can be used with the aim to cure a cancer or it may be given with the aim to relieve symptoms caused by cancer. Radiotherapy can be used with other types of treatment, such as surgery or chemotherapy, or a combination of all of these. Lung cancer and oesophageal tumours are sometimes treated with radiotherapy and chemotherapy at the same time, especially with the longer treatment schedules.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS?

Prior to the commencement of radiotherapy you and your doctor will sign a consent form. This is usually done in the initial consultation or at your planning appointment.

Before your radiotherapy treatment can begin, the area to be treated needs to be defined. This occurs during a planning session. You will be contacted by phone to arrange a visit for this session.

At the planning session a radiation therapist will take a CT scan of the area indicated by your radiation oncologist to help plan your treatment. You will then have tiny permanent marks placed on your skin. Also at the planning visit you will be given an appointment time to commence your radiotherapy. There are limited appointment times for the first treatment visit however, your remaining appointment times will be discussed with you on your first treatment day and booked at times that best suit your needs, depending on availability.

Following your planning session a radiotherapy nurse will discuss skin care and side-effects with you and address any needs or concerns you may have.

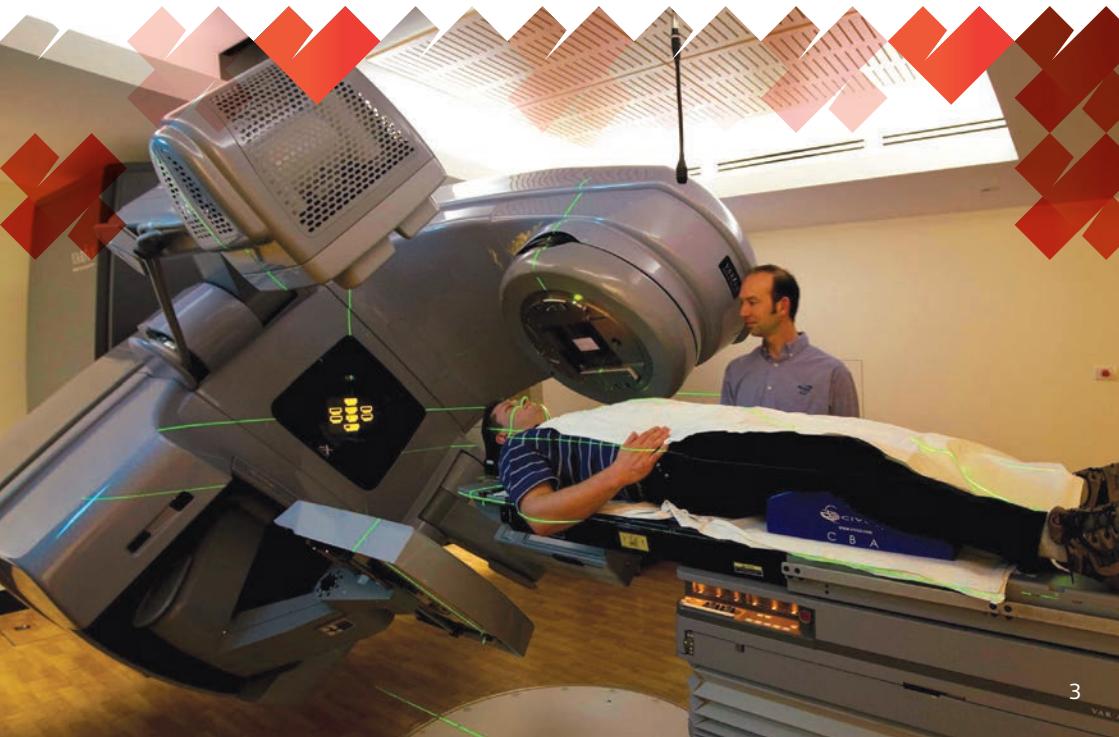
On the day of your first treatment, report in with your appointment card to the reception desk and take a seat in the waiting room. A radiation therapist will meet with you and discuss the procedure about to take place prior to taking you to the treatment area. Once in the treatment room, you will be placed in the same position as you were for the planning session and treatment will be delivered. You will be in the treatment room for up to 10-15 minutes each visit and the treatment may last for approximately 30 seconds from each of several different angles.

When you arrive each subsequent day for treatment, please hand your appointment booklet to the receptionists at the front desk and take a seat in the waiting room.

Whilst attending for a course of radiotherapy, a doctor will see you once each week in the treatment department. Nursing staff are also on hand to assist with any problems related to your treatment. The time spent in the the Andrew Love Cancer Centre (ALCC) may be as much as one hour each day, depending on daily waiting times and your need to see a doctor or one of the nurses.

If your oesophagus is within the treatment field you will also be seen weekly by the oncology dietitian. However, if this is not the case, but you would like to see the dietitian, an appointment can be arranged for you.

Below: The Linear Accelerator – used to deliver your treatment.





We encourage your family to watch your treatment so they have an understanding of how your radiotherapy is delivered.

WILL I FEEL ANYTHING?

You will feel no discomfort whilst treatment is taking place. The machine makes a noise but you feel and see nothing. Once you are positioned the radiation therapists will leave the room and program the machine and computers. You will be monitored on closed circuit television and there are microphones for communication if necessary. We encourage your family to watch one of your treatments from the console viewing area so there is better understanding of the daily activity.

Note: you are not radioactive whilst having radiotherapy and it is safe to be near children and pregnant women.

HOW WILL IT AFFECT MY DAILY LIVING?

You may continue your usual work and activities but you may experience some tiredness near the end of your course of treatment and in the weeks following.

WHAT SIDE-EFFECTS COULD OCCUR?

You may experience different degrees of these reactions, depending on the treatment site, the dose being given, the number of treatments, and your general health. Reactions will begin to occur within the second or third week of treatment.

Skin reddening and irritation

Slight reddening can occur by the second or third week of treatment and usually settles two weeks after your radiotherapy has finished. Skin care instructions can be found on page 8 of this brochure.

Fatigue

You may become increasingly tired as you progress through your treatment. This is a normal reaction to the radiotherapy and each person is affected in varying degrees. Finding a balance between rest and activity will help you cope with this side-effect.

Difficulty swallowing – (inflammation of the oesophagus)

This is the most common problem that occurs when radiotherapy is given to lung or oesophagus cancers.

Difficulty swallowing may occur two weeks after commencing radiotherapy and last two to three weeks after finishing. It is not uncommon to have some persistent discomfort when swallowing for up to a month after radiotherapy has been completed.

This problem is the result of inflammation and reaction of the lining of the oesophagus and may be increased if chemotherapy is given at the same time.

Your doctor will see you weekly and monitor this reaction. They can prescribe treatments for this such as antacids or Xylocaine viscous – a local anaesthetic to help numb the soreness. Regular soluble paracetamol may also be of assistance.

Cough (Bronchial Irritation)

It is very common to have a cough in association with the lung tumour itself or complications of lung cancer such as infections in the lungs. It is also possible to develop a cough specifically related to radiotherapy of the chest.

If you have problems with a cough or are concerned about your cough, your doctor may prescribe cough suppressants or other medication depending on the cause.

Lung reactions

Symptoms affecting lung function may be related to the underlying cancer, it may be related to other underlying health problems or it may be a reaction to radiotherapy treatment.

A specific reaction to radiation treatment of the chest which leads to shortness of breath is radiation “pneumonitis” – a type of pneumonia related specifically to radiotherapy treatment. This can occur six weeks to six months after radiotherapy.

This reaction is specifically treated with corticosteroids which suppress the inflammatory reaction related to radiotherapy. If you are concerned that you may have pneumonitis you should let your doctors know.

WHAT SHOULD I DO FOR MY SKIN?

Radiation can cause irritating reactions to the skin, but fortunately in treatment of conditions of the chest this is unlikely to be a major problem. The following suggestions are helpful for the care of skin exposed to radiation:

During Radiotherapy:

- A skin moisturiser will be given to you for use during treatment. At the start of treatment you are to apply the cream to the skin in the treatment area **TWICE DAILY** but as your treatment progresses you may need to apply the cream three to four times per day.
- You may wash the treated skin with warm water and mild, unperfumed soap. Pat skin dry – do not rub.
- Do not use talcum powder.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes. Loose cotton T-shirts or singlets are best.
- Avoid exposure of the treated skin to excessive temperatures including direct sunlight, heat packs, ice packs, electric blankets, saunas or hot spas during the course of your radiotherapy.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Can I wash the marks off of my skin?

We ask that you don't deliberately wash them off as this may further irritate your skin. The radiation therapists will re-apply them each day as required if they wear off.

What happens after my treatment is finished?

Your follow up arrangements will be discussed and organised by your treating doctor prior to completing your treatment.

When do the side-effects settle?

The treatment keeps on working even though you have stopped coming in for treatment. Therefore you might find that symptoms get a little worse before they get better. Generally the side-effects will have settled within two to three weeks of finishing your treatment course.

REMEMBER

Experienced staff members are available to help you. The team in the radiotherapy unit consists of doctors, nurse specialists, radiation therapists, social workers, dieticians and pastoral care workers – they are here to help you resolve any concerns or problems you may have.

Please do not hesitate to ask for help. Contact details can be found on the back of this brochure.

PHONE CONTACTS

Radiotherapy Department Reception
03 4215 2600 (General Enquiries)

Radiotherapy Nurses' Desk
03 4215 2603

www.barwonhealth.org.au



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OUR VALUES
RESPECT
COMPASSION
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