



SHAUKAT KHANUM MEMORIAL CANCER HOSPITAL & RESEARCH CENTRE

**RADIOTHERAPY
To
HEAD & NECK**

Patient Information

Leaflet #: 3-1

**7-A Block, R-3, M.A Johar Town, Lahore-Pakistan.
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SPECIFIC RADIOTHERAPY/TREATMENT

Treatment techniques and side effects vary with different areas of the body. This section looks at the head and neck region.

Radiotherapy to the head and neck

The head and neck area contains many different organs. The effects and side effects will vary depending on which area is being treated. For example, if you are having treatment to the brain the effects will be different to those of someone having treatment to the voice box. You may find this section gives helpful general advice.

Your doctor or radiographer will give you more details about your specific treatment.

What is a Mould?

The making of a mould or shell is one step in the treatment Planning process. The head is one of the most difficult parts of the body to keep still, even for a short time, so a support is made for you to wear at each treatment session. Any marks to guide the radiographers can then be drawn on the shell, not on your skin.

You will be given an appointment to attend the mould room. The technician and radiographers will explain what they are going to do and what you need to do to help them. You will be positioned on a couch.

A quick setting cream will be applied to all or part of your head or neck depending on which area is to be treated. Then a plaster of paris bandage will be laid over the top of this.

Your mouth and nose would not be covered and you will be able to breathe normally. A plastic shell will be made from the impression.

A well-fitting shell is difficult to make if you have a beard or moustache, so you may be asked to shave any facial hair before your appointment at the mould room.

What are particular side effects?

You may experience some of the general side effects of radiotherapy, such as tiredness or nausea. There may also be specific effects, which usually occur about two weeks after treatment has begun. Some of these, such as difficulty with swallowing or talking, are due to reactions inside the mouth or throat similar to that affecting the skin. They only happen if this area is being treated.

Treatment to the brain always causes tiredness and loss of hair from the head.

1. Any hair within the treatment field will gradually fall out. Hair loss is usually temporary and regrowth takes place in the months after the end of treatment. However for some people hair loss may be permanent. It depends on the dose of radiotherapy you receive.

If you are having treatment to your brain, you may continue to wash your hair with light shampoo but treat your scalp gently. Cut your hair short. Use soft hairbrush for combing. Do not use hot water, hair dyes and dryers. Scarves, wigs and hats may be used to conceal the loss.

2. The skin within the treated area often becomes red, dry and may feel tender or sore. You will be advised to wash the area with mild soap and warm water and to gently pat the area dry. Don't use any deodorants, perfumes or lotions on your skin other than those recommended by the team caring for you
3. You can shave using an electric razor but do not use safety razor. Do not use after-shave or other creams or lotions. Women should not use make-up.
4. Your skin may be very sensitive and you should not expose it to the sun or cold winds. Wear a scarf, cap or hat to protect the area being treated. .

If your neck or throat is sore, cover the area with a soft scarf. Do not wear tight collars or ties. Do not put hot water bottles or ice packs onto the treatment area. Use sun block cream and sunglasses during sunlight.

5. Gentle regular exercise of your neck and jaws will help to prevent stiffness. Please ask to see a physiotherapist for further advice.

If you are unsure about what you should or should not do, or how long you should continue with any precautions, please ask your doctor, radiographer or nurse.

What about eating and drinking?

Treatment to the face or neck may cause soreness of your mouth and throat, changes in your sense of taste and the amount of saliva you produce and difficulty with swallowing all these may affect your ability to eat and drink at a time when it is important that you eat well.

You may find the following suggestions helpful, both from the point of view of eating and also comfort. Don't smoke.

If you need help to stop or cut down smoking, please ask:

- Eat small meals frequently – five or six times a day.
- Eat soft moist foods, such as scrambled eggs, omelette, creamed potatoes, soups, fish, milk, puddings. Use sauces and gravies to make food easier to swallow.
- Drink extra fluids, especially milk.
- Use high-energy drinks, such as Sustagen, Complan and Ensure, the supplement your meals.
- Avoid very hot food and hot spicy dishes. Sharp foods or drinks, such as grapefruit juice may cause sore. Rough, dry foods like toast or cracker, may make your mouth sorer.

If you would like more advice, please ask to see the dietitian.

How should you look after your mouth?

Radiotherapy may make your mouth dry and sore, so it is important to keep your mouth clean.

Good oral hygiene (mouth care) can help to prevent infection and make chewing and swallowing less painful.

You should continue brushing your teeth regularly but use a soft brush and brush gently. A mouthwash may help to keep your mouth clean and moist.

Use magic mouth and Nilstat for mouth soreness. The nurses will be able to offer more advice and the doctor can prescribe medicines to help.

What about talking?

You may notice changes in your voice, or become hoarse, if your treatment is directed towards your throat. Sometimes you could lose your voice altogether. Rest your voice by not talking or talking quietly.

Do not whisper, as this will irritate your vocal cords. These effects on your voice are usually temporary and will decrease in the weeks following the end of treatment as any swelling disappears.

Where can you get help?

If you have any queries or problems related to your health, please contact:

Radiation Department of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital
& Research Centre

Phone # 0092 – 42 – 5945100

Ext. # 2469 (Radiation Nursing)

Time: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Days: Monday – Friday

Reference: CancerBacup (UK)