

Lung Cancer: Radiation therapy treatment

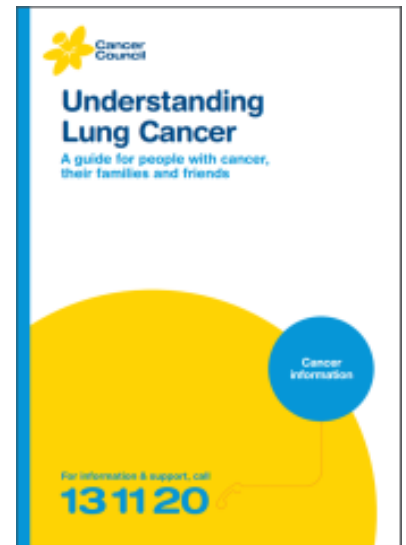
**Information for patients,
families and friends**

About this booklet

This booklet is designed to give you information about radiation therapy treatment for lung cancer and what to expect.

If you have any questions please speak to your Radiation Oncologist or the other helpful staff at Alfred Health Radiation Oncology during your next visit.

The Cancer Council of Victoria produces an easy to read lung cancer information booklet. Copies of the booklet can be found at Alfred Health Radiation Oncology or go to their website www.cancervic.org.au.



How does radiation therapy fit in with other treatments of lung cancer?

Radiation therapy may be delivered as the only treatment or as part of a combination of treatments for lung cancer. In some cases it is an alternative to surgery. For some patients we may discuss the use of chemotherapy as well as radiation therapy. Chemotherapy may be given to increase the effect of radiation on the cancer cells.

Chemotherapy is a drug which is given intravenously (into a vein with fluid). When chemotherapy is combined with radiation therapy it is given on a number of occasions throughout the treatment, but not every day. Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss this with you in detail if chemotherapy is suggested.

Side effects

Below is a list of the most common side effects associated with radiation therapy to the lung. Side effects may not be limited to the following, so if you have any concerns please speak to your Radiation Oncologist.

Side effects can be divided into two groups:

- Acute – Those which happen during treatment.
- Late – Those which happen after treatment is completed.

Acute side effects

Tiredness

Most people experience tiredness during radiation therapy treatment. This is usually mild and begins 2-3 weeks after treatment starts and continues 2-6 weeks after treatment is finished.

If you are also having chemotherapy, it is likely you will experience more tiredness, which will last longer after your treatment is completed.

This is not normally debilitating and in itself should not affect your daily activities or ability to drive. However, you may wish to go to bed earlier or take a rest during the afternoon. We strongly encourage you to continue your regular activities like walking or light exercises.

Redness of the skin and hair loss

You may notice some redness of the skin and hair loss in the area being treated 2-3 weeks after treatment has started. It may become more prominent towards the end of treatment and can include temporary itching and discomfort.

You will receive skin care instructions from your radiation therapy nurse who will also supply creams as necessary.

Difficulty swallowing

If the treatment area involves the oesophagus (food pipe/gullet) you may experience pain or difficulty swallowing. Avoiding hard, dry and spicy foods is recommended.

If you are having problems with eating or swallowing a referral to our dietician can be organised. Medication is available to help with these symptoms.

Late side effects

Lung

Long term there will be some scarring and reduction in your lung capacity as a result of the treatment.

You may notice you become breathless more easily, but it should not be enough to significantly limit your activity.

Pneumonitis

In a very small number of cases, people may develop breathlessness, dry cough and fever approximately 6-8 weeks after treatment is completed. This is due to a process called pneumonitis, which is inflammation of the lung caused by your radiation therapy treatment. It can resemble a chest infection. Steroids can help with the symptoms until it settles down. A lot of time and care is taken when planning your radiation therapy treatment to ensure this risk is less than 5%.

Spine

There is a very small risk of injury to the spinal cord, which controls movement in your lower limbs. A lot of time and care is taken when planning your radiation therapy treatment to ensure this risk is kept to less than 1%.

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Cancer Council Victoria

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If you would like to provide feedback or request a copy of this information in a different format, contact us at patient.information@alfred.org.au



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