

# **Superficial: Radiation therapy treatment**

**Information for patients,  
families and friends**

## **About this booklet**

This booklet is designed to give you information about superficial radiation therapy treatment 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.

## **Superficial radiation therapy treatment**

Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss the treatment with you, how many treatments are required and how often the treatments will be done. The treatment will be tailored to individual needs as all skin conditions are different.

Superficial radiation therapy treatment is painless and usually takes 10 to 30 minutes to complete. Most of this time is spent positioning the machine to best treat you. The machine or a piece of lead cut-out will be resting gently on your skin.

During the treatment, relax, stay as still as possible and breathe normally. The radiation therapists will need to leave the room when the machine is turned on but will be watching you through a window at all times. If you have any problems the staff can stop the machine and come into the room. The treatment machine will be turned on for up to a couple of minutes depending on the dose.

## **Side effects**

Below is a list of the most common side effects associated with superficial radiation therapy. 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**

### **Skin**

Skin that has been exposed to radiation can become red, warm and irritated, like sunburn. The skin can sometimes peel and or become moist.

### **Skin care**

On your first day of treatment you will be seen by a nurse who will give you advice on skin care and provide you with a cream to use on the skin in the treatment area. The cream will not stop the skin reaction from occurring, but will help to sooth the skin. If you wish to use other skin creams during treatment please discuss these with your doctor or nurse.

### **Taking care of your skin in the area being treated is important.**

The following tips should be followed throughout your treatment:

- Use luke warm water when washing the treatment area.
- Pat dry the area after washing.
- Avoid using soap, creams, shampoo or other products on the area, unless prescribed by your radiation oncologist or nurse.
- Avoid wet shaving in the treatment area. An electric shaver may be used.
- It is important to shield your skin from exposure to the sun during and after your treatment, until the skin is completely healed.
- Avoid other forms of direct heat on the treatment area (i.e. hair dryer, electric blanket, solariums).

The skin reaction will peak about a week after your treatment is finished, so please continue your skin care for 2-3 weeks after treatment is completed.

## Late side effects

### Skin

- The colour, texture and sensation in the skin can also be altered due to the radiation treatment. A small number of people will develop telangiectasia (tiny, more obvious blood vessels in the skin). If these develop they are permanent.
- Non-healing ulcer (rare).
- A different type of skin cancer can develop in the treated area (very rare).

### Hair

Hair loss can occur. If this happens it will only be in the treatment area and may be permanent.

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#### Further information:

##### The Alfred

[alfredhealth.org.au](http://alfredhealth.org.au)

##### Alfred Health Radiation Oncology

[alfredhealth.ro](http://alfredhealth.ro)

##### Latrobe Regional Hospital

[lrh.com.au](http://lrh.com.au)

##### Cancer Council Victoria

[cancervic.org.au](http://cancervic.org.au)

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](mailto:patient.information@alfred.org.au)



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