

Moving oncology care forward
so that our patients
can look forward to
life's moments.



Advice for patients
receiving radiation
treatment to the neck,
mouth and throat

Some people receiving radiation treatment may experience a reaction in the area being treated. Reactions vary from none to a sunburn-like reaction, where the skin becomes reddened, dry and sometimes itchy.



In severe cases, blistering may occur. Not everyone will experience a skin reaction as it depends on the area being treated, the dose of radiation, the type of radiation and the number of treatments being given.

If your mouth or esophagus is being treated, the inside of your mouth or throat may become painful, and be prone to drying out, developing ulcers and/or fungal infections.

For most people, if a skin reaction is going to occur it is not usually apparent until after the second week of treatment and reaches its peak about two weeks after treatment is completed. The reaction may take up to six weeks after treatment to completely resolve.

The radiotherapists administering treatment on the machines will keep a close eye on the condition of your skin during your treatment and can further advise you if a reaction appears. There are several things you can do to minimise skin reactions:

What to do

	Only if your oncologist recommends it may you use a mild, unscented, pH balanced soap e.g. baby soap or a similar gentle soap. Use soap sparingly in the area being treated.
	Use warm rather than hot water when washing, and if shaving, use an electric shaver NOT blades.
	Do not rub the treated area. Friction aggravates the skin reaction. Dry it carefully by patting the area with a soft towel.
	Do not apply anything to the treated area unless a radiotherapist or radiation oncologist recommends it. This includes cosmetics, perfumes, shaving cream and sunscreen.
	Only if your oncologist recommends it may you use cornflour or baby/antiseptic powder on the area being treated.

	If your skin becomes itchy, try not to scratch as this may increase the reaction. Tell a radiotherapist or your oncologist. There are creams to relieve this.
	If you experience pain, particularly that wakes you at night or prevents you from eating or drinking, please discuss this with your oncologist. There are medications available to relieve reaction symptoms.
	Avoid heat, sun and wind exposure. Cover up with a hat, or clothing or stay in the shade. Even when you have finished your treatment, you must take care of the skin in the treated area, as it will always be more sensitive to the sun.
	If having treatment to the throat, avoid tight-fitting clothes around your neck, loosen collars and avoid scratchy or rough fabrics.
	Make sure you are drinking lots of water. If your mouth is becoming dry, try to drink liquids often (not too hot or too cold), chew sugar-free gum and avoid hot, spicy or acidic foods and alcohol. Eat food that is soft and easy to swallow.
	It is common for patients receiving radiation to feel more tired than usual. This is a normal side-effect of radiation treatment.
	If you are taking any vitamin supplements, please discuss with your oncologist as to which supplements you can continue taking during treatment.
	You may use a non-alcoholic mouthwash (Alocclair or Glycothymol). Your oncologist may prescribe a mouthwash combination.
	Your oncologist will see you once a week whilst you are on treatment. They may advise on, or prescribe creams and medications to help relieve symptoms.
	Do not hesitate to ask a radiotherapist or your oncologist if you have any questions or are experiencing any problems.
	Please inform your oncologist if you are taking any other treatments as these may reduce the effectiveness of your radiotherapy treatment or aggravate any side effects.

Life Oncology

www.lifehealthcare.co.za

