

Your care during radiation therapy to the head and neck

Your radiation treatment appointments

- Please arrive 10 to 15 minutes before your appointment time.
- At the Level 0 reception desk, scan the barcode on your radiation schedule or check in with the receptionist, then go to the waiting area closest to your treatment unit.
- Appointments are every day, Monday to Friday. There are no scheduled treatments on the weekends or holidays.
- Your treatment may be over several days or weeks and may start on any day of the week. We will give you a schedule of your treatment appointments.

Treatment appointment changes

- Your schedule may change while you are on treatment. We will try to give you as much notice as possible.



If you are unable to attend or will be late, please call us at 905-387-9495, ext. 63600 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

If you are unwell, please call your Primary Team.

Questions

- If you have questions about your schedule, treatments or side effects, please ask your Radiation Therapist.

Your review appointments

- You will meet with a health care provider on a regular basis to check how you are doing. This may or may not be your doctor.
- When you come for each appointment, please complete a Symptom Assessment. You will be asked to rate different symptoms about how you are feeling along with your activity level. You can complete the Symptom Assessment at home on-line <https://isaac.cancercare.on.ca/> or on a touch screen computer at the JCC.
- By completing a Symptom Assessment you will help us understand how you are feeling. Together we can discuss what you need help with most and offer help.

Patient Assessment Office

- If you have concerns or problems related to radiation treatment on a day that you do not have a review appointment, you can see a nurse in the Patient Assessment Office (next to Clinic G). Your radiation therapist may direct or recommend that you go to the Patient Assessment Office.
- If your radiation treatment appointment is late in the day (after 4:00 pm), and you wish to see a nurse, you are welcome to arrive early. After you check in, walk over to the treatment area, speak with a Therapist who will then direct you to the Patient Assessment Office.

While on treatment

- When you arrive in the radiation unit, you may need to change into a hospital gown. Treatment appointments are usually 20 minutes long. Most of the time is spent getting ready for treatment. The actual time of the radiation treatment is usually about 5 to 8 minutes.
 - A Therapist will guide you into the planned position and you will need to lie still and breathe as instructed. You will not feel the radiation at all. The machine makes a humming noise when treatment is being delivered.
 - During treatment, the Radiation Therapists leave the room. They will watch you on a TV screen and speak with you by intercom. You can signal a Therapist by calling out or waving your hand.
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Side effects

The side effects you have will depend on:

- your general health
- any other treatments you may have had or are having
- the number of radiation treatments
- the location of the tumour or lesion



Your health care team will check for side effects.

Please tell them your concerns.

Most side effects begin during the 2nd week of treatment and gradually develop through treatment. Possible side effects include:

- change in taste
- thickening of saliva
- fatigue
- your skin in the treatment area may become pink to red
- skin may become tender, dry, itchy or irritated
- loss of appetite
- dry mouth
- difficulty swallowing
- sore mouth and throat

Take care of yourself

Please follow these instructions during your treatments and for at least 2 weeks after all treatments are done.

- Do not rub, scratch or scrub the area being treated.
- Gently wash the skin in the treatment area with warm water and a mild non-deodorant soap such as Dove or baby soap, while bathing or taking a shower.
- Gently pat dry with a soft towel.
- Protect the skin from all sources of heat or cold such as hot water bottles, heating pads, ice packs or saunas. Protect skin from direct sunlight or harsh cold.

Take care of yourself (continued)

- Do not use any creams or lotions (or sunscreens) on the treatment area unless directed by your health care team.
- Do not use makeup, perfume, shaving lotions or cologne on the treatment area.
- Men should use an electric shaver. Do not use manual razors or razor blades.
- Wear loose fitting cotton clothes and comfortable open collar shirts.
- Do your daily mouth care as taught.

Activity and eating

- If you experience tiredness it may increase for a week after treatment but should gradually go away. Rest when needed, and pace your activities.
- Talk with your primary team before swimming or increasing your physical activity.
- Eat and drink to keep your nutritional and energy levels up. Changes in what you eat may be needed.

Sun and skin after treatment

- The skin in the treatment area may remain dry and sensitive for some time. It is possible that some skin changes may be permanent.
- Treated skin is always more sun sensitive. Protect your skin from the sun by keeping the area covered with a soft scarf or wide brimmed hat. When the skin is uncovered, use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or more with UVA/UVB protection.

Please refer to the booklet “**Head and Neck Cancer Radiation Treatment**” that you were given when you met with your oncologist and primary nurse. The booklet discusses many of the possible side effects. Your primary team will discuss these side effects with you.



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