Translation and interpreting services

If you do not speak English as a first language, use sign language (BSL) or have a learning difficulty, our in-house Bilingual Health Advocacy and Interpreting Service can help.

St Bartholomew's, Mile End and The Royal London Hospitals
Telephone: **020 7377 7000**

Newham University Hospital
Telephone: **020 7476 4000**

Whipps Cross University Hospital
Telephone: **020 8539 5522**

Text Relay service for Deaf people
Our dedicated number is **18002** and then **add in the number** you are wanting to phone**.** It is available 24/7 for deaf people to access emergency services through interpreters across our hospitals.

Please scan the QR code below to access our patient information library and for translation of leaflets

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services: www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

Switchboard: 020 3416 5000
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk

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All our patient information leaflets are reviewed every three years

NHS
Barts Health
NHS Trust

Managing the side effects of Radiotherapy to the Head and Neck

Patient information

Important: Please tell us if you have a pacemaker as we will need to monitor your heart during your treatment.

Please let us know if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.

It is important to remember that you need to use contraception whilst receiving treatment for cancer in order to prevent pregnancy – please see our leaflet 'Avoiding pregnancy during radiotherapy and chemotherapy'.

WeCare

Sore skin

You may notice the skin around your face and neck becoming red or darker**.** It may become itchy and sore to touch and break in places towards the end of the treatment course. You will be given a cream to moisturise your skin although you can use any moisturiser as long as it doesn't contain "sodium lauryl sulphate" or any strong perfumes as these contain metal and will make your skin reaction worse. If the skin breaks, our nurses will give you a different moisturiser to use.

Wash gently with a mild soap and do not use any aftershave or perfumes on the skin in the treatment area.

If you still wish to shave your face during treatment, please use an electric razor as wet shaving will make your skin very sore.

Sore mouth and throat

Your mouth and throat may gradually become very sore and ulcerated. Your radiotherapy team will give you pain killers and mouth washes to help with the soreness. It is very important to maintain good oral hygiene during your treatment and we advise using a soft or baby toothbrush to help with this.

Drop in Mon-Fri: 9am-4pm

Macmillan Cancer Information Centre

Vicky Clement-Jones

Ground Floor, West Wing, St Bartholomew's Hospital.

Just drop in Mon-Fri 10am-12noon and 2-4.30pm. Or call on **0203 465 6611.** If calling outside working hours, ring Macmillan free on 0800 808 00 00 or visit the Macmillan website.

Smoking Cessation

St Bartholomew's Hospital

King George's Building (KGV) **Clinic 1**

Drop-in clinic Wednesdays 9am-1pm

Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.

For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 0208 223 8934.

Tell us what you think.

Tweet us @**NHSBartsHealth**

Talk to us via **www.facebook.com/bartshealth**

Minimising Side Effects

There are certain things you can do before starting your treatment to minimise the side effects:

Stop smoking

Stopping smoking during and after radiotherapy is very worthwhile. Research shows that stopping may make the radiotherapy more effective as well as reducing side effects. Your radiotherapy team can refer you for help with stopping smoking.

Alcohol

Alcohol can also make mouth soreness worse. Avoid alcohol if you can, especially neat spirits.

Contact Us

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy Basement, King George V Wing (KGV), St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield, London EC1A 7BE

Radiotherapy Reception **0203 465 5222**

Emergency Hotline (when the department is closed) **07917 093 738**

Maggie's Centre @ St Barts

St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield, London, EC1A 7BE

Tel: 0203 904 3448

Regular mouthwashes are very important during radiotherapy, and these will be provided for you. Saline (salty water) is also an excellent mouthwash you can make and use at home. The radiotherapy H+N team will advise on how to prepare saline during the course, when it is appropriate.

Eating and drinking

The sore mouth and throat can make eating and drinking more difficult, especially hard, or crunchy food. Please follow the advice of the dietician who may also provide you with special nutrition drinks you can use instead of solid food.

Good hydration is essential for getting through your radiotherapy successfully. You should aim to drink 1.5 – 2 litres of fluid a day. Try carrying a bottle of water around with you to sip from throughout the day. If you think you are not managing to drink 1.5 litres of fluid a day, it is very important you let the radiotherapy team know.

Thick/sticky saliva

Your saliva will become thick and sticky, and it may be harder to swallow. Staying well hydrated can help this. Sucking sugar-free

sweets or chewing sugar-free gum can also help with saliva production.

If you struggle with the sticky saliva, use lots of mouthwashes, and let the radiotherapy team know as they may be able to provide you with a nebuliser that can help thin the secretions.

Nausea and vomiting

If you are having chemotherapy alongside your radiotherapy, you might be sick or feel nauseous. If this happens, please let the radiotherapy team know and they will give you appropriate anti-sickness medicine. If you cannot face eating a normal size meal, then eating little and often can help.

If the nausea or vomiting stops you from being able to drink water then you must tell the team straight away.

Opening your bowels

Some of the medicines given to you during your treatment might give you constipation or diarrhoea. If this happens it is very important you tell the team so they can help you. Do not let yourself become constipated as this can make you feel unwell very quickly.

Fatigue

It is quite common to feel more tired than normal during treatment. Rest if you need to, but if you feel able to do so, you should carry on with all your normal daily activities. It has been proven that light exercise can help with radiotherapy induced tiredness.

Tiredness may continue for some time after the end of treatment.

Who should I inform if I am concerned about anything?

The first people you can inform are the radiographers who are treating you. They can then either give you advice or refer you to another member of the team who can help.

The head and neck radiographer is also always around for advice and support.

You will be seen by the following team members during your treatment:

- Treatment radiographers
- Radiotherapy nurses
- Specialist dietician
- Speech and language therapist
- Head and neck radiographer
- Radiotherapy doctor