

What to Expect while Receiving Radiation Therapy to the Eye



PMH

Your Radiation Oncologist, R.N. Case Manager and Radiation Therapist will provide you and your family with care, support and information throughout your treatment. Please ask any questions you have when you come each day. Your Radiation Therapists will address your concerns or refer you to other members of your health care team. Additionally, you may talk to your doctor or R.N. case manager at your weekly appointment with them.

Side effects that you may experience during your course of radiation therapy

Radiation side effects vary from person to person. The side effects you may have will depend on:

- Which part of the eye and/or surrounding areas are treated
- The type of radiation used
- The amount (dose) of radiation given
- Your general health

Most side effects are temporary and likely will subside about 4 to 8 weeks after your last treatment.

When tumours or other conditions around the eye are treated with radiation therapy, the side effects to be expected depend to a great extent on the specific parts of the eye and orbit that actually receive the treatment. Usually the structures are carefully shielded, and the area that is treated is very small. Therefore we do **not** anticipate general side effects such as loss of appetite, nausea, fatigue, fever or pain. However within the area receiving a high dose of radiation there may be significant side effects to expect – these will naturally vary with the tissue receiving treatment.

This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

© 2009 University Health Network. All rights reserved.

Author: Radiation Medicine Program

Created: 10/2009

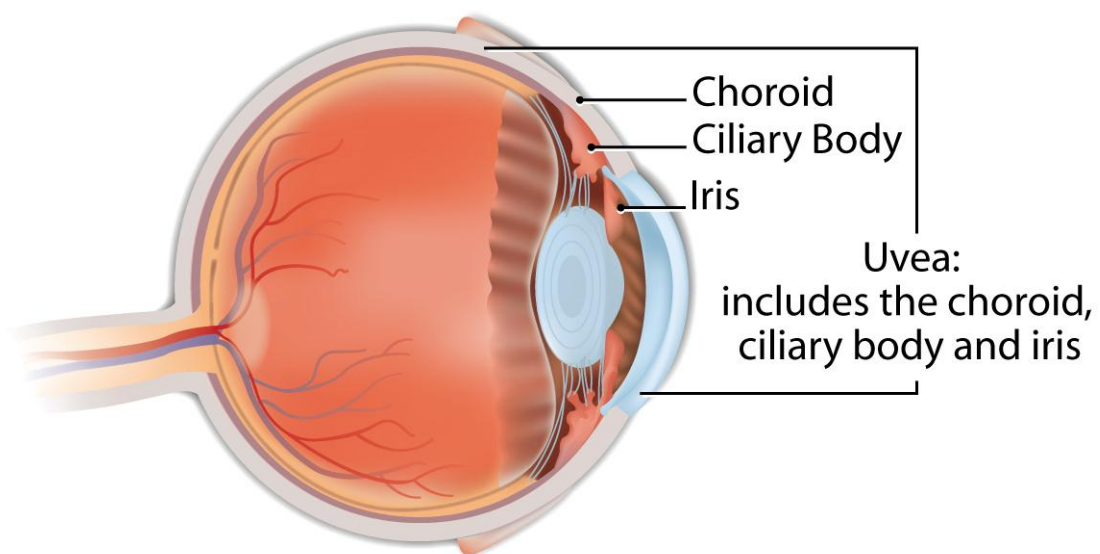
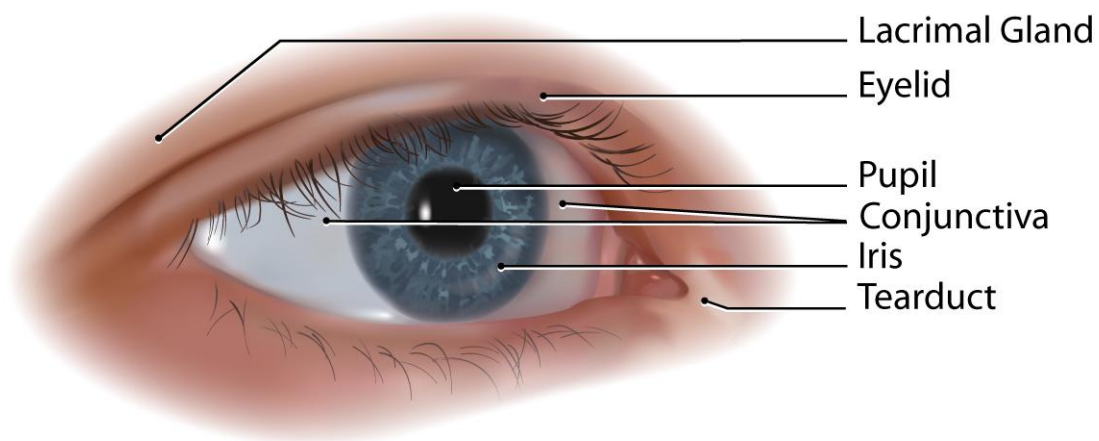
Form: D-5630



University Health Network
Toronto General Hospital Toronto Western Hospital Princess Margaret Hospital

The important structures around the eye include:

- **Lacrimal Gland** - not visible - it is responsible for occasional lubrication and tears
- **Eyelid** - skin, lashes, glands, tear ducts, and conjunctiva on the inside surface
- **Conjunctiva** - a pink membrane on the inside of the lids that folds back on itself to cover the visible part of the “white” of the eye (sclera).
- **Choroid and uvea** - supporting tissues within the eyeball



Some of the possible side effects are:

Skin changes	Skin in the treatment area may become red and dry, and may flake or peel (like sunburn). This is a normal reaction to treatment that will get better. It usually occurs 1 to 2 weeks after treatment begins. If your treatment is short, skin changes may not appear until all your treatments are finished.
Loss of lashes	If part of your eyelid is treated you may lose the eyelashes in that area. With most other treatments, there is no loss or it is temporary. Your eyelashes will grow back after your treatment, although this may take several weeks or months.
Dryness	Dryness of the eye can be a short-term or a lasting effect from radiation treatment. If dryness is a problem, you can moisten your eye with eye drops. Your Radiation Oncologist may refer you to an Ophthalmologist (Eye Specialist).
Feeling tired	Radiation therapy to the eye does not usually cause fatigue. However, you may feel tired if you are concerned or anxious about the effects of treatment. This will improve as your side effects get better.

Reactions to treatment of specific conditions

<p>Eyelid cancer – Cancer on the skin and/or the conjunctiva.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skin reactions are common 1 to 2 weeks after this treatment begins.• The conjunctiva becomes red (inflamed) and makes extra mucus. This can be uncomfortable. The degree of the reaction depends on how much of the conjunctiva was treated. The shielded parts are not affected.• Gently clean the mucus from your eye with a cotton-tipped swab and warm water. Do this when you wake up and when needed.
--

Conjunctival lymphoma – Cancer of the conjunctiva.

- The conjunctiva and the nearby skin of the eyelid become inflamed and make extra mucus.
- Gently clean the mucus from your eye with a cotton-tipped swab and warm water. If your eye feels dry or scratchy, eye drops (artificial tears) or an eye ointment can help. After the redness and mucus get better, your eye may still be dry. You may need to continue using artificial tears.
- Within 2 to 3 years, the lens in the treated eye may become cloudy. This is called a cataract. You may need surgery to replace the lens and restore your vision.

Graves' disease - A condition in which the eye muscles become inflamed and thickened. It is not cancer.

Eye metastases - Deposits of cancer in the eye, which came from other cancers (such as from the breast or lung).

Orbit tumours - Cancer of the tissues around the eye.

- Treatment for these conditions usually spares the skin and conjunctiva. You should have little or no discomfort.
- There can be scarring later on. Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss how this may affect you.

Choroidal melanoma - Cancer arising from the inner layers within the eye.

- To treat this cancer, a large dose of radiation is directed deep within the eye. Usually, there are few or no side effects. The retina near the tumour becomes scarred, which usually damages vision later on. Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss this with you.

How to care for your skin

Always wash your hands - before and after skin care.

If your eyelid or skin becomes red or inflamed:

- Gently wash your face with warm water. Gently pat your skin dry.
- Use a water-based moisturizing cream such as Lubriderm® or Glaxal base™.
- Do not rub or scratch the area.
- Do not expose the area to direct sunlight. Wear sunglasses if you go outside.

If your skin is flaking or peeling, has blisters or open areas with wet discharge:

- Soak the area with saline solution (water with a little added salt). Your Radiation Therapist or RN Case Manager will tell you how to do this.
- Protect open areas by covering them with a dressing. Visit the Radiation Nursing Clinic for help with dressings and advice about skin care products. Your Radiation Oncologist may prescribe eye drops or pain medication.

What happens when I finish treatment?

Before you finish your treatment sessions, you will be given a follow-up appointment to return and see your Radiation Oncologist. This appointment is to follow up on any treatment side effects and to assess the results of treatment. Continue to take all your prescribed medications. If you have a skin reaction, it will usually settle after a few weeks. Your healthcare team will give you specific information about caring for your reactions when you are finished your treatment. If you have questions following treatment, please contact your RN case manager or Radiation Oncologist.