What to expect while receiving radiation therapy to the pituitary gland

For patients who are having radiation therapy

Read this resource to learn about:

• Planning your radiation therapy
• Having your radiation therapy treatment
• What the side effects from treatment are
• What happens when you finish treatment
• Where to get more information
Planning your radiation therapy (CT simulation)

Please check in at the reception desk on level 1B. We will take your photograph to help us identify you during your treatment.

You can expect to be here for 1.5 hours for this appointment.

At this appointment we will use a CT scan and an MRI scan to decide on the area for treatment. A device that molds around your head will be made. This is called a mask.

It will be used during your treatment to help you get in the same position each time. The radiation therapist will explain this and any other procedures to you at the appointment.

The radiation oncologist, physicists and therapists will use the information from the scans to develop a plan that is right for you.

Before my treatment starts:

You can continue with your normal activities and diet before starting treatment. Your health care team will review any special instructions about your self-care and medications before and during treatment.

Having your radiation therapy treatment

When will I know about my first treatment appointment?

You can expect a phone call at home a few days after your CT simulation appointment. We will give you the date and time of your first appointment.
Where do I go for my radiation treatment appointments?

Radiation Therapy is given on Level 2B of the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. This is located 2 floors below the main floor. Go to the reception desk and they will show you how to scan your card to check in.

Can I schedule my radiation treatment appointments at times that are convenient for me?

Because we treat so many patients every day we cannot guarantee your exact appointment time. Your radiation therapists will try to help you if there are special circumstances.

What happens at the treatment appointment?

Each day when you come for your treatment you will wear the mask. The radiation therapists will fit the mask over your face and check that it is fitting correctly.

Many checks and measurements will be done to ensure that the treatment is given accurately. Your first day of treatment is usually the longest day, but all other days after that will be quicker.

Once you are ready for treatment, the radiation therapists will leave the treatment room. They can see and hear you at all times. Do not hesitate to call out or raise your hand if you need to.

You will not feel or see anything while the treatment is being given, however, you will hear some noises made by the machine, which is normal.

More pictures will be taken to check your position before the treatment is started, and you may feel the bed move slightly at this time.
How long is the treatment?

You should plan to be at the hospital for 30-60 minutes each day. Your treatments will take about 30 minutes.

When will I see my radiation oncologist?

You will see your radiation oncologist and nurse once a week while you are on treatment. This will be arranged with your radiation treatment and the visit will be in the radiation department.

You can also be seen in the Radiation Nursing Clinic on level 2B as needed. The nurses there are part of your health care team and can help you manage your side effects.

What are the side effects from treatment?

Your radiation oncologist or radiation therapist will explain the side effects from radiation treatment and how to manage them. Each patient is very different and experiences different side effects.

Side effects depend on the area being treated, the amount of radiation given and the general health of the person.
The most common side effects and suggestions for dealing with them are listed below.

Fatigue:

Fatigue or tiredness is a common side effect. It varies with each person but often begins early in treatment. It can increase gradually during treatment, and usually gets better over 1 to 2 months after treatment is over. Continue doing your usual activities if you feel well enough to do so.
What suggestions do you have for managing fatigue?

- Pace yourself, especially with activities that are tiring, and rest as you need to.
- Drink lots of fluids.
- Try to keep eating and follow the Canada Food Guide (ask about a referral to one of our dietitians if necessary).
- Ask for help with daily activities that you cannot manage.
- Research has shown that light exercise may reduce the fatigue or stop it from getting worse. (For example, 10-15 minute walk three times a week if you can).

To learn more about fatigue pick up the pamphlet: “How to Manage Your Fatigue”

**Headaches:**

Some patients may experience headaches. You may take Tylenol™ or a prescription drug prescribed by your radiation oncologist if needed.

**Hair Loss:**

Some patients experience a small amount of hair loss. Your radiation oncologist will be able to give you more details depending on your individual treatment plan.

**Skin changes:**

Some patients may experience changes to their skin in the treatment area. Your radiation oncologist will be able to give you more details depending on your individual treatment plan.

To learn how to care for your skin please pick up the pamphlet: “Taking care of your skin during radiation therapy”
Nausea and vomiting:

Nausea and vomiting may occur, but it is not common. You will be told about medication to help you manage if this occurs. If you have persistent nausea and vomiting you should check in to the nursing clinic for assessment.

Most side effects generally occur after 10 days of treatment and improve anywhere from 2-6 weeks after treatment is completed.

What happens when you finish treatment?

You will be given an appointment to see your radiation oncologist or your referring doctor a few months after your treatment has finished. After treatment finishes, some of your side effects will carry on. Continue to follow your healthcare team’s instructions until you feel better.

Your scalp may always be sensitive to the sun, so you should protect it with clothing and use a sunscreen of SPF 30 or above.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions and discuss any concerns with your health care team.

Where to get more information

Please visit the Patient and Family Library on the main floor, or visit our website: www.theprincessmargaret.ca for more information and resources.