

# Skin & Other Superficial Areas

This information is to be used in conjunction with **My Treatment Booklet**. It provides unique details about receiving radiation to the **skin and other superficial areas**.

## Pathway



### 1 First specialist appointment

Please refer to My Treatment Booklet.

### 2 Orientation

A patient care specialist (radiation therapist or nurse) will explain the procedure in more detail and answer any questions or concerns you may have about the process or treatment.

### 3 Planning CT Simulation

#### Position:

ARO has a range of special equipment to help maintain and reproduce your position for every treatment session. The radiation therapists will make sure you are as comfortable as possible.

You will have some tracings made of the treatment area.

#### Receiving treatment to face, head, or neck

To hold you in the correct position for treatment a specially moulded mask and neck cushion will be made. If you have significant facial hair this may need to be trimmed before the mask is made.

The mask is made from a thermoplastic material which, when warmed, is gently moulded over your head. It takes 20 minutes to set. Positioning marks are drawn on your mask to help position you the same way each day for radiation therapy. Sometimes the thought of having your head immobilised may bring about a feeling of claustrophobia. *If you are claustrophobic, please discuss this with an ARO staff member prior to your appointment so we can provide suitable support. Please also bring any medication that helps you. If you have a mask the best way to communicate with your mask on is to use hand signals. **Thumbs up is you are OK, thumbs down means you need assistance.***

## Scan:

You may have a CT scan in the above position. *While the scan is taking place radiation therapists are outside the room watching you through a viewing window. **If you need help give a wave with one of your hands.***

### 4 First day of treatment

You will be placed in the same position as you were in the CT or preparation room. If any immobilisation equipment was made, it will be used daily for treatment.

A radiation therapist may give you some gel or cream. You will also receive instructions about how and where to apply this. Please do not use any other skin products at the same time.

### 5 During treatment

Your radiation oncologist will advise you of possible side effects during and then after treatment is complete. *Please speak to a member of the ARO team about any concerns or changes so we can provide advice and support to meet your needs.*

## Possible short-term side effects

### Fatigue

Tiredness will likely occur. Some people continue to work while others find this too tiring.

#### Self-care:

- *Keep hydrated (drink 1.5-2L a day, preferably water). Minimise alcohol.*
- *Eat as well as you can.*
- *Exercise regularly e.g. relaxed walking three times per week can be beneficial. You can continue your usual level of activity or introduce mild exercise. Please listen to your body, do not over exert yourself, and rest when you feel the need.*
- *Try to get a good nights' sleep.*

### Skin reaction

Skin colour can progressively redden or darken and skin can feel irritated, mildly swollen, and tender. This is often noticed in the second week of treatment. Skin blistering or peeling can occur in skin folds due to rubbing between skin surfaces.

#### Self-care:

- *When washing the treatment area, use warm water, avoid scrubbing, and gently pat dry. If using soap use mild soap/shampoo/conditioner such as Dove extra sensitive or Simple soap from the supermarket.*
- *Do not apply heating or cooling devices in the treatment area such as wheat or ice packs. Do not use a hairdryer on the treatment area.*
- *Avoid wet shaving/waxing in the treatment area during the course of treatment and until any skin reaction has completely gone. An electric razor is fine.*

- *Avoid hot pools, spa pools, chlorinated pools and saunas while on treatment and until any skin reaction has completely gone.*
- *Be aware of the clothing you wear over the treatment area:*
  - *Wear loose fitting, soft, cotton clothing.*
  - *Keep the treatment area protected from the sun and wind.*
- *Do not apply sunblock to the treatment area during radiation therapy. Following radiation therapy, once skin reactions are completely gone this area will **always** be more sensitive to the sun. Please cover or apply at least 30+ SPF (sun protection factor) to exposed skin areas.*

## Hair loss

Only anticipated in areas of high dose. Your radiation oncologist will advise accordingly.

### 6 Last week of treatment

Please refer to My Treatment Booklet.

On your last day you will see a nurse or doctor.

### 7 After treatment

Please continue with the current management and self-care of side effects for at least 2-4 weeks after treatment.

## Possible long-term side effects

- Skin pigmentation and texture can change slightly (often unnoticed under hair).
- Skin breakdown can occur and a district nurse can be organised as necessary.
- There is an extremely rare risk of developing different cancers, many years after radiation.
- Hair loss in the area being treated, sometimes permanent.
- Swelling (lymphoedema) may require specialist advice regarding exercise, specialised massage therapy and compression garments.
- Damage to the nerves may cause pain, numbness and weakness in the area. This is very rare and can be medically treated.

*Self-care:*

- *Visit Support Services on **www.aro.co.nz** for additional services before, during and after treatment.*