

This instruction is intended for our patients who are in a care relationship.

Satakunta Hospital District | Vaasa Hospital District | Hospital District of Southwest Finland

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## For radiotherapy patients

### What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is a local treatment of cancer. It can be administered as a curative treatment, alone or combined with a surgery or cancer medication. Radiotherapy can be also used to alleviate some of the symptoms caused by cancer. Radiotherapy destroys cancer cells, and it's usually administered in small single doses. This is to protect normal cells that usually recover quickly from the changes caused by radiotherapy.

### Planning of radiotherapy

You'll see a physician before the treatment is started. You can take a close relative or a friend with you. During the appointment, the physician will explain the treatment plan to you. The physician and a nurse will talk to you about radiotherapy and its adverse effects, for example.

Before radiotherapy, you'll have a computed tomography (CT) and/or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. The scan takes approximately 30 minutes, and you have to lie still during the scan.

Radiotherapy is planned individually for each patient. A physician, a physicist and a nurse prepare a radiotherapy plan after the scan. They decide the number of treatments and the size of a single dose that will be given to you. Because of the planning, radiotherapy is normally not started immediately after the scan. The length of the course of treatment varies from one single treatment to approximately 8 weeks.



### Administering radiotherapy

During the radiotherapy, you'll lie on a special table. The treatment takes approximately 15 minutes. You have to lie still during the treatment. The accuracy of treatment is checked with X-ray images. The nurses use a radiotherapy device to treat you. You'll be alone during the treatment but the nurses can see and hear you all the time. You may hear a buzzing sound

during the treatment. The sound is a sign that the device is on. Normally, radiotherapy is given from several directions. That's why the device turns around you.

Radiotherapy is pain-free. You do not emit radiation after the treatment. Treatment is given on weekdays, for the treatment cycle prescribed by the doctor.

Usually, patients come for treatment daily from home. You can also stay in a hospital ward if required because of your condition or the treatment.

The nurses will look after you during the radiotherapy treatment.

**Tell them if you have side effects. You can also tell the nurses about other feelings or sensations you might have.**

You can use public transport to travel between the hospital and home. For medical reasons, your doctor can give you permission to use a taxi.

## **Smoking cessation**

Smoking cessation is an important part of cancer treatment. Smoking can impair the effect of radiotherapy and make the side effects last longer. It also increases the risk of getting a new cancer. You can get help for quitting from your doctor or a smoking cessation counsellor.

## **Alcohol**

Using alcohol is not recommended during the treatment cycle.

## **Exercise**

Light exercise is recommended for example walking outside. It is also good to rest enough.

## **Side effects of radiotherapy**

Radiotherapy also affects the normal healthy cells and it can cause side effects in the treated area. The side effects vary individually but they normally start approximately 2–3 weeks after the start of the treatment. The side effects can continue after the treatment has ended. They can be treated, however.

### **The most common side effects include:**

- Radiotherapy of the **head or brain**: headache, nausea, loss of hair in the treated area.
- Radiotherapy of the **mouth and neck**: dry mouth, ulceration of oral mucous membranes, altered sense of smell and taste, redness, dryness and burning of the skin.
- Radiotherapy of the **chest and lungs**: irritation of the oesophagus, heartburn symptoms, cough irritation.

- Radiotherapy of the **breast**: redness, dryness and burning of the skin in the treated area.
- Radiotherapy of the **stomach**: nausea, flatulence, diarrhoea.
- Radiotherapy of the **pelvis**: urinary frequency, burning on urination, flatulence and diarrhoea, dryness of mucous membranes.

### **Fatigue and taking care of yourself**

The daily treatments can cause fatigue. Radiotherapy doesn't necessarily prevent daily chores, hobbies or working but it is possible to get sick leave for the duration of the treatment.

Depending on your condition, you can see a doctor also during the treatment cycle. During the treatment, you should allow yourself more rest and eat healthy and diversely. Your body needs energy to recover

### **Pain**

Radiotherapy isn't painful but its side effects can include pain, soreness and swelling in the treated area. These can be treated with regular painkillers.

### **Sexuality**

You can have sex during radiotherapy. Your illness and the treatments may cause sexual impotence and lack of sexual desire. It helps to discuss the matter openly with your partner, nurses, a doctor and a sexual counsellor.

### **Mental well-being**

Mood swings and fear of the future are natural reactions to illness. Discussions with loved ones and health care personnel can help to clear your thoughts. Help is also available from a support person from a cancer society, for example.

### **Support services**

You have the opportunity to discuss illness-related questions with various experts. The personnel of the radiotherapy unit can make an appointment for you. Experts you can discuss with:

- social worker
- rehabilitation counsellor
- dietician
- physiotherapist
- sex therapist

- psychiatric nurse
- hospital priest

## Follow-up after radiotherapy

Normally, patients have an appointment with a physician on the last week of the radiotherapy. After radiotherapy, your condition can be monitored at a cancer outpatient clinic, another outpatient clinic or your physician's office. Contact radiation therapy, if

- You have questions about the treatment or follow-up care.
- you have questions about the treatment of radiotherapy side effects,
- The side effects don't improve in approximately 3 weeks from the end of the treatment.

## RADIOTHERAPY UNITS

The personnel of radiotherapy units include, for example, physicians, physicist, nurses and x-ray assistants.

**Turku:** T-hospital C-wing 1. Floor, Mon-Fri 7.50 a.m. - 3 p.m. 5 treatment and 2 imaging devices, Inquiries: +358 2 313 1807. (9-10.30 a.m.)

**Pori:** O wing, floor 0, Mon-Fri 7.50 a.m.-3 p.m., 2 treatment and 1 imaging devices, +358 2 627 3731.

**Vaasa:** Q0 and Q1 wing, Mon-Fri 7.50 a.m. - 3 p.m., 3 treatment and 1 imaging devices, +358 6 213 2942.

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