

## Follow-Up Care after Radiation Therapy

*From: the American Cancer Society*

### What does “follow up” mean?

No matter what type of cancer you’ve had, you will need regular doctor visits to check your progress after radiation treatment ends. You may need help dealing with any problems that may come up, too. This phase of your treatment is called follow-up care.

Your follow-up care will include checking the results of your treatment, but it may also include more cancer treatment, rehabilitation, and counseling. It may include visits with your primary care doctor, surgeon, *medical oncologist* ([on-kahl-uh-jist] a doctor specially trained to treat patients with chemotherapy), and your radiation oncologist. Your follow-up care will depend on the type of cancer you have and other treatments you have had or will have.

Questions you may want to ask your doctor after radiation therapy:

- When can I go back to normal activities?
- How often will I need to see you?
- Which tests will be done and why?
- What symptoms or side effects should I look for and let you know about?
- When can I wear a *prosthesis* ([pros-thee-sis] an artificial replacement for a part of the body that has been removed due to cancer) or have reconstructive surgery?
- Do I need to follow a special diet?
- When can I go back to having sex or trying to have a baby?

### Care after radiation therapy

For a short time after your treatment, you will need to continue some of the special care used during treatment. For instance, if you still have skin problems after your treatment ends, be gentle with the skin in the treatment area until all signs of irritation are gone. You also may need extra rest while your healthy tissues are rebuilding and healing. You may need to limit your activities to save energy and not try to go back to a full schedule right away.

### Pain after therapy

A few patients need help managing pain that continues after radiation therapy. Unless directed by your doctor, do not use heat or cold to relieve pain in any area treated with radiation. Talk to your doctor or nurse and describe the location and type of pain in as much detail as possible. Keep working with your cancer team until you are able to get it under control.

## When should I call the doctor?

After treatment, you are likely to be very aware of your body and any slight changes in how you feel from day to day. If you have any of the problems listed below, tell your doctor right away:

- Pain that doesn't go away, especially if it's always in the same place
- New lumps, bumps, or swelling
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, or trouble swallowing
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fever or cough that doesn't go away
- Unusual rashes, bruises, or bleeding
- Any other signs or symptoms mentioned by your doctor or nurse

Do not hesitate to let your doctor know about any new problems or concerns you have. It's always best to find out the cause of a problem so it can be dealt with right away.

## What about going back to work?

If you have stopped working, you can return to your job as soon as you and your doctor believe you are up to it. Some people are even able to work during their radiation therapy. If your job requires lifting or heavy physical activity, you may need to change your routine until you have regained your strength.

If you have any questions about your work, health insurance, or rights as an employee, call us.

## What records do I need to keep?

You will want to get copies of your treatment records to keep. It's important that you be able to give any new doctor you might see in the future the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Gathering these details soon after your treatment may be easier than trying to get them at some point in the future. Make sure you have this information for your own records:

- A copy of your pathology report from any *biopsy* (**by**-op-see) or surgery
- If you had surgery, a copy of your operative report
- A copy of your radiation therapy treatment summary
- If you stayed in the hospital, a copy of the discharge summary that doctors prepare when patients are sent home
- A list of the cancer treatment drugs you took, the drug doses, and when you took them

Any time you see a new doctor, be sure that you make copies of these records and keep your originals for yourself. After a certain period of time, doctors' offices and hospitals destroy this kind of information.