



Radiation Treatment Overview Head & Neck



During treatment, side effects MAY include:

Common:

- Sore throat and/or mouth. You may need a feeding tube to get the nutrients that your body needs.
- Red and dry skin with some blistering
- Thick saliva in the mouth
- Nausea - more common if you are also having chemotherapy
- Weight loss
- Hoarse voice (This can be permanent)
- Ear and/or ear canal pain or irritation
- Fatigue
- Hair loss on the face, neck or scalp
- Taste changes

After treatment is finished, side effects MAY include:

Common:

- Swelling under the chin that comes and goes from time to time
- Long-term changes to the skin (e.g. skin appears darker, lighter or thinner)
- Dry mouth and taste changes that may be permanent
- Ear and/or ear canal pain or irritation
- Fatigue that should get better with time
- Hair loss on the face, neck or scalp
- Tooth decay (This can be prevented with fluoride and good dental care)
- Decreased thyroid function that may require medication

Less Common:

- Permanent difficulty eating or swallowing that may require you to need a feeding tube.
- Hearing loss
- Mild to moderate hoarse voice (This can be permanent)
- Treatment area may heal slower after injury or surgery

Rare but can be serious:

- Numbness or weakness in the arm and shoulder
- Risk of stroke
- Risk of an injury to any part of the body that has received radiation (e.g. spinal cord, jaw bone, voice-box, skin, and nerves of the neck) during treatment. This may be serious, require major surgery and could be life threatening.
- There is a very low risk that a new cancer will be caused by the radiation in the future.

The severity of these side effects will vary from person to person. If you are having chemotherapy during your radiation treatments side effects may be worse. When you begin your radiation treatments, the radiation therapists will give you information to help you manage the side effects. You will also be able to meet with your radiation oncologist during your treatments to talk about any side effects that you may have.

This list may not all apply to your radiation treatment. Please speak to your radiation oncologist to understand what to expect from your treatment.