

# Radiotherapy

A Guide For Patients/Families



This brochure provides information about **Radiotherapy**. It is designed to respond to the questions most frequently asked by patients and their families.



آغا خان یونیورسٹی ہسپتال، کراچی

The Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi.

P.O. Box 3500, Stadium Road, Karachi-74800, Pakistan

[www.aku.edu](http://www.aku.edu)





## **What Is Radiotherapy?**

Radiotherapy or Radiation treatment is the use of carefully measured doses of radiation to treat malignant diseases. The type of radiotherapy that most patients receive is X-ray therapy, where a machine directs high-energy rays to the precise area affected by your illness.

Radiotherapy is often given in several small doses over a specified period of days or weeks, but may be given in a single treatment. The staff who operate the radiotherapy machines are radiation therapy technologists.

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

- **Will Radiation Hurt?**

No. You will feel no pain at all while you are actually having your treatment.

- **How Does Radiotherapy Work?**

Our bodies are made up of cells, and cells have the capacity to divide. Radiation has a damaging effect on cells. Radiotherapy destroys the cancer cells in the treated area. When a cell is exposed to high energy radiation, the DNA gets damaged. At the time of cell division the damage prevents the cell from dividing. Ultimately the damaged cell (in this case cancerous cells) will die.

- **Will Radiotherapy Cause Me To Lose My Hair?**

No, unless your head is being treated. You may also lose body hair in the area being treated. This hair loss can begin during and/or after treatment. Hair will usually start to grow back after treatment is finished but may take several months.

- **Is It Safe?**

Radiation used in medical treatment is given in controlled, carefully measured doses. The aim is to treat the illness without causing any major harm to the patient.



- **Will I Be Radioactive?**

No. Patients treated by external beam radiation do not become radioactive. The radiation does not stay in your body after treatment, so you cannot do anyone else any harm. It is perfectly safe for you to mix with other people and to have visitors if you are in the wards.

- **I Already Have Problems With My Health. Will Radiotherapy Treatment Make Them Worse?**

In most cases it will not make your existing medical condition worse. Your doctor will be able to explain to you if the treatment will affect your existing condition.

**Common Side Effects of Radiotherapy:**

**SORE SKIN:**

The skin can become red, sore or itchy in the treatment area, like a sunburn. It can also peel off.

**Care:**

- Do not scrub.
- Use lukewarm (not hot) water and a mild soap to wash. You may need to be careful to avoid washing off the marks.
- Avoiding tight or itchy clothing. Cotton is best.
- Protect the treatment area from the sun. Before going outdoors; always cover your treated skin with light, close-weave clothing.
- Avoid using any creams, deodorants, medicines, perfumes, cosmetics, or other substances on the treatment area without your doctor's approval.
- Don't use a razor blade on the treatment area. Check with your doctor or nurse before using an electric razor.



### **NAUSEA AND VOMITING:**

This depends on which part of the body is being treated. In some cases treatment to the abdomen (stomach) or brain may cause nausea and or vomiting.

#### **Care:**

- Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian for their opinion regarding which foods to eat.
- Eat small meals frequently.
- Avoid fried foods or those which are high in fat.
- For severe nausea and vomiting, try a clear liquid diet (broth and clear juices) or bland food that is easy to digest.
- Check with your radiation oncologist, radiation therapy technologist or nurse before taking home remedies during your radiotherapy treatment.
- If the problem persists ask your doctor.

### **DIARRHEA:**

Patients who undergo radiation therapy to the lower abdomen may experience diarrhea.

#### **Care:**

- It is important to tell your doctor as soon as possible if this happens to you.

#### **It may be helpful to AVOID these foods:**

- Milk and ice cream, yogurt, buttermilk, and other similar foods.
- High fiber foods, including raw fruits and vegetables, whole grain bread, spicy food and caffeine.
- If you have fever and/or bloody diarrhea you must seek immediate medical attention.

  
**TIREDNESS:**

You may feel a sense of fatigue or have less energy during and after your course of treatment.

**Care:**

- Rest when needed
- Save your energy. Help your body by avoiding over exertion.
- Try to get more sleep at night and take a nap during the day if needed.
- Have a well balanced diet.

**HAIR LOSS:**

If you have hair in the area being treated (scalp, face or body), you may lose some or all of it during radiotherapy. Usually it will grow back after the treatment is finished. You will not lose hair outside the treated area.

**Care:**

- It is important to cover your head with a hat or scarf, especially when in the sun or during cold weather.
- Use mild shampoo for washing.
- Limit shampooing to 2-3 times a week.

**LOSS OF APPETITE:**

You may lose normal interest in food during your course of radiotherapy.

**Care:**

- Try to eat food high in protein and calories such as meat, chicken, fish, egg, dairy products, and special nutritional supplements.
- Eat small meals frequently.
- Avoid foods with strong odor.
- Eat when you feel hungry.



**For more information, please contact:**

Radiotherapy Department  
Aga Khan University Hospital  
Karachi.  
Phone : 3486-1872  
          : 3486-1870-1