

## Side Effects from Radiation Treatment to the Rectum

Your doctor has recommended that you have a course of radiation therapy. This leaflet contains information about the treatment and its short and long term side effects. Each person reacts differently to treatment so the side effects can be different for each person. This leaflet discusses the most common. (If you are going to have chemotherapy, the side effects of this will be discussed with you separately).

There are two types of common side effects with radiation treatment to the rectum. There are **short term** effects which happen during or shortly after the treatment and **long term** effects which **may** happen months to years later.

The **short term** side effects that may happen are:

- Lethargy/tiredness
- Skin reaction
  - redness, dryness (similar to sunburn)
  - blisters on the skin
  - possible hair loss (in the treated area)
- Bowel Upset
  - loose bowel motions (diarrhoea)
  - a feeling of urgency to move your bowels
  - bleeding when passing a bowel motion
  - a mucous discharge
  - pain on passing a bowel motion
- Bladder Upset
  - an increase in the number of times you pass urine
  - stinging on passing urine

While on treatment you will be seen weekly by your doctor, who will help you to manage these side effects if they happen.

The **long term** side effects that may happen are:

- Skin Changes
  - Your skin in the treatment area may become darker than it used to be
- Bowels
  - a permanent change in your bowel habits
  - a bloody/mucous discharge
  - impaired continence
- Altered sexual function and fertility
- It is very rare but radiation therapy can cause a second cancer

If you have any concerns about the side effects of treatment, please discuss this with your doctor.

### What happens now?

Radiation treatment is given daily (Monday - Friday) for either 1 week or 5-6 weeks. Before your course of radiation treatment can start you will need to attend the Oncology Department for the planning of your treatment. This appointment will be sent to you in the mail.

More information about radiation treatment and its side effects can be found in your information folder or through The Cancer Society. You can contact them on 0800 226237,

visit their website ([www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)) or visit them on the ground floor of the Oncology Department.  
This space has been left blank so that you can make notes or write down any questions that you may have: