

SIDE EFFECTS OF LUNG CANCER TREATMENT



Radiation therapy for lung cancer causes side effects. A side effect is a negative or unwanted reaction to treatment. Side effects come on slowly, usually starting about 3 weeks into treatment, and last for a few weeks after radiation therapy ends. They usually get better once radiation therapy is complete.

COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

SKIN CHANGES

Radiation therapy can give your skin a mild-to-moderate pink color, like with a sunburn. You may have other symptoms, such as soreness or dry skin. Your healthcare provider may recommend creams and ointments to help with this. However, creams and ointments should not be used on your skin within 2 hours before treatment because it can increase the effects of radiation on your skin, making the skin reaction worse.

HAIR LOSS

You may lose hair at the site of your radiation treatment. It may take 3 to 6 months for the hair to grow back after radiation therapy has ended. In some cases, the hair may not grow back.

FATIGUE

Fatigue, or extreme tiredness, is another common side effect. Fatigue can be managed by eating fresh vegetables, fruits and lean meats, drinking at least 6 8-ounce glasses of water, and getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. Other things that can cause fatigue include:

- Stress
- Poor nutrition
- Pain medication
- Chemotherapy
- Surgery

POOR APPETITE

Radiation therapy can take away your desire to eat. However, your body needs food to fuel the healing process. To help you get the calories and nutrients your body needs, try these tips:

- 1 Drink fluids 30 to 60 minutes before or after meals, but not at mealtime. Fluids taken with meals can limit available stomach space for food and make you feel full.
- 2 Small frequent meals (6 to 8 times per day), are easier to manage than 3 large meals.
- 3 Use color and variety and creativity to make meals more appealing.
- 4 Have nutritious snacks readily available to eat when you are hungry.
- 5 Light exercise (per physician approval) before a meal may help increase appetite.
- 6 Take advantage of the times when you feel hungry by eating.
- 7 Eat your favorite foods at any time of the day.

WEIGHT LOSS

To combat weight loss, we recommend a power-packing diet, which increases the amount of calories and protein in your food without increasing the amount of food you need to eat. The easiest way to power pack is to add fat and carbohydrates (sugar) to food you already eat. Calories from fat and carbohydrates are necessary for energy. See the Power Packing handout for more information.

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COMMON SIDE EFFECTS (continued)

LUNG IRRITATION

Radiation therapy may irritate your lungs and cause a cough, shortness of breath, or other breathing difficulties. These side effects usually improve after treatment is over, although in some cases they may continue for a while.

ESOPHAGITIS (eh-sof-a-JEYE-tiss):

Your esophagus runs from your throat to your stomach and carries the food you eat. If it is exposed to radiation, you may get a sore throat and have trouble swallowing during treatment. This might make it hard to eat anything other than soft food or liquids for a while. Your radiation oncologist may prescribe a medication to soothe and numb your esophagus so you can eat.



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