

Radiation Therapy: What to Expect Once the Treatments are Finished

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After a long and perhaps challenging time, you have come to the end of your radiation treatments. There are several things you should know and expect to occur over the upcoming days and weeks.

When will my side effects from the radiation go away?

Many people who have side effects from their radiation treatments continue to have these side effects for about 2 weeks after their treatments finish, or even longer. For some people, the side effects can reach their worst (or “peak”) during the first week after their treatments finish. This is because the treatments are continuing to do their work and side effects continue to develop even though the treatments are finished. Although every person is different, the majority of side effects will gradually disappear within 3-4 weeks after your treatments have finished. Continue to care for yourself the same as you were during the treatments until you feel you are back to your old self.

How should I expect to feel over the coming weeks?

Although it is hard for us to say how you will feel when the treatments are over, many people have the same concerns. You may feel happy or excited to be getting back home or back to a “normal” life. At the same time, you may feel anxious about leaving the Cancer Centre and the staff that were there to help you. Many people feel a certain comfort when their concerns and problems are dealt with everyday by the therapists, nurses and doctors. Once your treatments are finished, some people feel a little abandoned and nervous about going home. These are normal feelings. You should be given phone numbers and names of contact people who you can get in touch with for help or support. You may even be a little anxious about trying to get back to a normal life. Give yourself lots of time to get back into the swing of things. Take one day at a time.

**What are your questions? Please ask.
We are here to help you.**

Do I have to come back for a check-up?

After your last radiation treatment and before you leave the Cancer Centre you should be given an appointment, or told when, where and who will be doing your check-ups.

Your radiation doctor may want to see you about 6-12 weeks after your last treatment. This gives the treatments time to finish their work. It may be decided that another doctor, such as your surgeon, medical oncologist or family doctor does your check-ups. You may need to have some tests done during your check-up such as blood-work, x-rays and an exam by the doctor. Please make sure that you have either an appointment before you leave on the last day, or an idea of when you will be contacted about your check-up.

Will I need to make any changes to my lifestyle?

The radiation treatments may make numerous changes to your body. These changes will last for a long time, or be permanent. Your health care team should talk to you about these changes and what you can do to cope with them. Most people have permanent skin changes over the area that was treated. The skin may be more sensitive to hot or cold sensations, and will definitely be more sensitive to sun exposure. You will have to be very careful to keep the treated area out of the sun completely with the use of clothing and/or hats. You should also wear a high SPF sunscreen. The area that received the radiation treatments will be more easily tanned or burned than the rest of your body. Any tattoos you received for your markings are permanent, so you will have them forever. They may fade with time and turn lighter in colour.

Questions you may want to ask your Health Care Team

- Will I have any long-term side effects from my treatments?
- How long will my side effects last?
- When can I go back to work?
- What if I need to talk to a member of the health care team after my treatments are over?
- I am nervous and worried about finishing my treatments. Is this normal?
- Do I need to come back for a check-up?
- Will I have any tests done for my check-up?
- What changes do I need to make as a result of my treatments?

Notes:

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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