

General Information for Patients Receiving External Beam Radiation Therapy

DISCLAIMER REGARDING COVID-19

During this time of Level 4 lockdown, KKC staff are following all government and ministry of health guidelines. This includes moving majority of our face-to-face appointments to phone or video conferencing and means a small change to the way our consent process operates. Our Radiation Oncologists will be doing a verbal consent procedure via virtual conference instead of the usual paper based process.

In this document you will find general information about the radiation therapy process and its common side effects. As this treatment is localised to your specific tumour site, the Radiation Oncologist will verbally go over information specific to you and offer you an email or posted version of the written information unless you request otherwise.

PLEASE NOTE: Entry into our building during this time will be restricted to patients only. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

General Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy

The aim of this leaflet is to help inform you, and those that are close to you about radiation therapy for the treatment of cancer, and what you can do to assist yourself during treatment. Your radiation therapy treatment will be fully explained by your radiation oncologist, radiation therapist or nurse, who will be happy to answer any questions.

About the Kathleen Kilgour Centre

One in two patients diagnosed with cancer will potentially benefit from radiation therapy. The Kathleen Kilgour Centre is here to make this care accessible to patients in the Bay of Plenty.

Our centre offers:

- Caring, compassionate and professional staff
- Strict quality standards
- Services for both public and private patients
- Access to a range of accommodation and transport assistance.
- We welcome enquiries from patients outside of the Tauranga region
- Follow up care
- An attractive, caring and supportive environment for patients, and their families
- Free parking for patients within the facility
- Access to a range of support services
- Chemotherapy services based next door to the facility if required

When you receive treatment at the Kathleen Kilgour Centre, you will be treated in a calm, and modern environment, with the best possible treatment technology. We are aware that each patient is an individual, with special needs and concerns, so we endeavour to make your treatment as hassle free as possible. We respect and value your privacy throughout your treatment journey at the Kathleen Kilgour Centre. Having a friend or family member with you during the treatment process can provide a great deal of comfort and support, so we welcome you to have a support person with you wherever possible.



Planning your visit

Please check in at reception when you arrive. Your information will be verified and staff will be notified of your arrival. If you have any questions, concerns or personal needs at this time, please let the receptionist know and they will find the right person to help you.

When scheduling appointment times, every effort is made to accommodate you in regards to travelling, work, and childcare. You will receive a copy of your schedule on the first day of treatment.

What is Radiation Therapy?

Radiation therapy uses targeted energy (e.g. X-rays, radioactive substances) to destroy cancer cells, shrink tumours, and/or alleviate certain cancer-related symptoms.

It may be used:

- As a primary treatment to destroy cancer cells
- In combination with other treatments to stop the growth of cancer cells
- Before another treatment to shrink a tumour
- After another treatment to stop the growth of any remaining cancer cells
- To relieve symptoms of advanced cancer e.g. to help control pain

Radiation therapy works by damaging cells. Normal cells are able to repair themselves, whereas cancer cells cannot. Thus the time between daily treatments allows your healthy cells to repair much of the radiation effect, while cancer cells are not as likely to survive the changes. Techniques used at the Kathleen Kilgour Centre allow radiation oncologists to optimally target the radiation dose to treat the cancer whilst protecting healthy cells.



Pregnancy and Radiation Therapy

If you are pregnant or feel that there is any chance that you may be pregnant, it is important to discuss this with your radiation oncologist before radiation therapy begins and during treatment if your pregnancy status changes. You must try and avoid becoming pregnant during treatment.

How long will this treatment take?

The treatment is given as an outpatient, Monday to Friday, and takes about 20 minutes each day. To avoid rushing and to allow for unexpected events you should allow for an hour each day. A course of treatment is variable depending on which area is being treated. The number of treatments you need will be decided by your radiation oncologist.

During treatment let the radiation therapists know immediately if you:

Become worried, anxious or do not feel well while the treatment is being given. Raise your hand and the radiation therapists will interrupt the treatment and attend to you immediately.

Side Effects and management

Radiation therapy treatment can cause side effects due to an inflammation effect. Your treatment is localised to the site you are having treated so your side effects will relate to that area. The general things to be aware of are; skin reaction of the treatment area and fatigue. These are usually temporary and can

be treated. In the event of an emergency after opening hours, please proceed to your nearest after hours medical facility.

A skin reaction may appear similar to a sun burn. Your skin may become red, dry or itchy. We ask that you use a simple moisturiser such as *fatty cream*, twice daily to keep your skin hydrated. This will not stop any reactions occurring but may ease them. Please be gentle with your skin in the treatment area and keep covered up from the sun. Your treatment team may give you a separate booklet with more skin care advice if required.

Fatigue or tiredness is common for patients throughout their cancer journey. By maintaining your normal lifestyle, gentle exercise, rest and a healthy balanced diet you can minimise these effects. Please let your treatment team know if appointments at certain times of the day may help you manage fatigue.

Some reactions can last for a few weeks, (short term side effects), whilst others may begin and continue months after your treatment has completed (long term side effects). Your oncologist will discuss those which are specific to you and your treatment. If you have any questions or concerns we encourage you to talk to a member of your treatment team.

Frequently asked questions:

Will I be radioactive?

You will NOT be radioactive during and after external beam radiation therapy treatment. You can safely mix with other people, including children and pregnant women, at any time during and after your treatment.

Will I lose my hair?

You will not lose the hair on your head unless it is in the treatment area. You may lose some body hair (for example, the hair under your arm) if it is in the treatment field and this can begin to happen during or after treatment.

Do I still need to use contraception?

Yes. It is still possible to become pregnant. Pregnancy should be avoided as radiation therapy can have a harmful effect on an unborn baby. Talk to your radiation oncologist about suitable contraception methods.

Can I go swimming during treatment?

You can swim in salt water during your treatment; however it is important to wash off in clean water afterwards. You are advised to avoid swimming in chlorinated pools as the chlorine may irritate the skin in the treatment area.

Can I drive during treatment?

In general, most patients will be well enough to drive whilst they are receiving radiation therapy treatment. If you feel unwell or are on strong pain killers please discuss with your radiation oncologist prior to driving a motor vehicle. Please be aware that depending on the site of your treatment you may not legally be allowed to drive. Your radiation oncologist will discuss this with you if necessary.

Is it safe to take vitamin tablets and herbal medicines?

It is important you continue to take your medications as prescribed by your radiation oncologist; however before starting any new medicines, including prescription, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and alternative, natural or herbal medicines tell your Oncologist. Some medications can interact with your treatment.

Who can I talk to if I am not coping?

Attending regular radiation therapy treatments can make some people feel emotional, upset and/or anxious. Some patients may have difficulty adjusting to what is happening to them and a fear of the unknown is common. This may or may not be your experience.

Being as well informed as possible is helpful to many people. It can also be helpful to tell a member of the team what your concerns are so they can reassure you. We have access to a number of support services; please ask a member of your treatment team if you would like further information.

How do you know if the treatment is successful?

It may not be possible to know if your treatment has been successful immediately after treatment. Your radiation oncologist will see you for a follow up appointment after treatment is complete and will discuss your progress.