

KATHLEEN KILGOUR CENTRE

Leading Radiation Therapy

**General Information for
Patients Receiving External
Beam Radiation Therapy**

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The Kathleen Kilgour Centre



At the Kathleen Kilgour Centre we aim to provide treatment using a combination of cutting edge technology, world class expertise and personalised patient care. Our state-of-the-art, innovatively designed facility, offers services and support to people in the Bay of Plenty and beyond, providing both public and privately funded cancer care.

The Kathleen Kilgour Centre recognises all patients as individuals, with different needs and concerns. We endeavour to tailor our care to meet those particular requirements. Staff will guide patients through each step of the process and provide support, understanding and compassion.

Our Commitment to You:

- Your treatments will be delivered in a discreet but friendly, and caring environment
- During treatment you can expect ongoing support from a range of clinical staff including Registered Nurses, Radiation Therapists and Radiation Oncologists (doctors). Following treatment, we will arrange appropriate follow up care if this is required
- Access to Speech Language and Dietetic services for those patients who require it
- Access to a range of other support services as required
- Free parking for patients within the facility

What is Radiation Therapy?

Radiation Therapy uses high energy x-rays to damage cancer cells, shrink tumours and/or alleviate cancer related symptoms such as pain, bleeding or cough. This treatment can also be used for some benign conditions (non-cancerous cells that are growing abnormally).

Radiation Therapy treatment is delivered by a Radiation Therapist using a machine called a linear accelerator. Radiation is aimed at the treatment site and causes cancer cell death by damaging the way these cells grow and multiply. Your body will then clean up and remove these damaged cells.

Some healthy cells that are close to the treatment area may be damaged by the radiation too. This is what causes Radiation Therapy side effects. Unlike cancer cells, your healthy cells have a mechanism to repair themselves. It is the time between treatments and having weekends "off" that allows this repair to happen. After treatment is completed your healthy tissue repairs and most side effects will improve over time.

Radiation Therapy 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 (e.g. surgery) 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)

CT Simulation

Your next visit to the Kathleen Kilgour Centre will be to the CT suite on Level One. The purpose of the CT simulation is to determine the position you will be treated in and to locate the exact area to be treated in relation to the surrounding normal tissues. Your simulation is performed on a machine called a CT scanner, and the images taken are used for your individualised radiation treatment planning.



Depending on the treatment area and technique required, an immobilisation device can be made to reduce your movements. These devices will take approximately 15 to 45 minutes to make, during which time you will not experience any discomfort. Once you are properly positioned you will undergo the CT scan which usually takes just five minutes and is painless. Small permanent tattoo dots may be given to assist in the daily set-up of treatment.

Please inform the staff members if you have any mobility limitations.

Treatment Planning

The next step in the Radiation Therapy process is Treatment Planning. Using the information obtained during CT, a 'target volume' is determined by your Radiation Oncologist on a computer planning system. Clinical staff at the Kathleen Kilgour Centre calculate the best method of giving a dose of radiation to the target volume, whilst at the same time avoiding as much normal tissue as possible.



Treatment

Treatment is usually given once a day and takes around 20 minutes. A course of Radiation Therapy generally lasts between one day to eight weeks. If you are having more than one treatment, it will usually be given five times per week. You will be required to lie in the same position as during the CT process, and we ask that you try to keep as still as possible during the procedure.



The Therapists must leave the room during the treatment; however, they monitor you on a camera from outside the room. There is also an intercom system, so if you need assistance, call out or raise your hand.

The direction of the beam is set by moving the machine and the treatment bed, on which you are lying, to the correct position. The treatment itself is painless; you will not see or

feel anything while the radiation is being delivered but you will hear some noises from the machine. While the machine will not touch you, it can feel like it gets close.

Side Effects

Radiation Therapy can cause side effects due to an inflammation response from treatment. It is difficult to predict how you will react to treatment as the side-effects you experience are dependent on;

- The area of the body being treated
- The amount of radiation given
- Your individual response
- Other treatments you may be having such as Chemotherapy



Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss those which are specific to you and your treatment.

SHORT TERM SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects that develop during the course of treatment are known as acute or short term side effects. These reactions are most noticeable **7- 14 days after treatment** is complete.

These side effects are usually temporary and can be treated. These will be discussed on your first day of treatment and you will see a doctor or a nurse during treatment to monitor any reactions. The type of side effect you experience depends on where you are being treated and what technique we are using. Please ask if you are not sure.

Skin Reaction

A skin reaction may appear similar to a sunburn; your skin may first become red, then become dry or itchy in the area of treatment. Not everyone gets a skin reaction but if you are at risk, we have some general advice below.

Advice for managing skin reactions:

- You are advised to wear loose-fitting clothes in the area of treatment
- Wash your skin gently with mild, unperfumed soap and water and pat gently to dry
- Use only an unperfumed simple moisturiser (i.e. Fatty Cream) twice daily to keep your skin hydrated
- Avoid swimming in chlorinated pools and hot pools as the chlorine may irritate skin in the treatment area
- Avoid rubbing/scratching the skin in the treatment area
- Avoid wet shaving the skin in the treatment area
- Avoid hair-removing creams (including wax) in the area of treatment
- Keep the treatment area covered up from the sun

If you are concerned about a product you are using, please bring them in to show your team.

Hair Loss

You may experience loss of hair in the area being treated. Hair in the treatment area may start to fall out 2-3 weeks into treatment but usually grows back after Radiation Therapy is complete. It can take several months to grow back and you may find it grows back a different texture or colour than before.

Rarely does the hair not grow back, but sometimes it grows back patchy. Please discuss with your Radiation Oncologist if this is likely with your treatment.

Fatigue

Many people experience fatigue or tiredness during and after their Radiation Therapy. While some people are able to continue with their day-to-day activities, including working in their usual jobs, others may need to rest more.

Advice for managing fatigue:

- Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated
- Maintain a well-balanced diet
- Maintain your usual level of exercise
- Plan your days to allow for rest when required
- Ask family and friends for help with daily tasks (i.e. cooking dinners)

Discomfort

Some patients may experience further discomfort in the area of treatment as a result of the Radiation Therapy. This may occur in those patients being treating for pain symptoms, as Radiation Therapy can sometimes cause further temporary inflammation in the area being treated. This is called a pain flare and usually settles quickly. Discomfort will be managed with your Radiation Oncologist and Nursing Team input.

Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss if you are likely to experience this, ensuring you have a plan in place to manage it, should it occur

LONG TERM SIDE EFFECTS

Most patients return to 'normal' after treatment is complete, but a few may experience long term side effects. Chronic or Long Term side effects may begin and continue months after your treatment has completed. These will be discussed with you in-depth by your Radiation Oncologist.

General Radiation Therapy long term side effects can include:

- Discomfort in the treatment area.
- Changes in skin pigmentation in the treatment area.
- Firming of the skin in the treatment area.

Frequently Asked Questions:

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.**

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.

Who do I tell if I have a Pacemaker, ICD or cochlea implant?

You must tell your Radiation Oncologist or Radiation Therapist if you have a pacemaker, ICD or cochlea implant. Radiation Therapy can affect how these devices can work, therefore we need to plan your treatment around such devices.

What do I do if I'm a smoker?

Research has shown that if you stop smoking Radiation Therapy can be more effective and can also reduce the side effects of treatment.

Will I be radioactive?

You will **NOT** be radioactive during and after Radiation Therapy treatment given to you at the Kathleen Kilgour Centre. You can safely mix with other people, including children and pregnant women, at any time during and after your treatment.

Can I drive during treatment?

In general, most patients will be well enough to drive whilst they are receiving radiation therapy treatment. but 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. If you feel unwell or are on strong pain medication, please discuss with your Radiation Oncologist prior to driving a motor vehicle.

Who can I talk to if I am not coping?

We understand some patients may be anxious about Radiation Therapy. While this can be expected, our staff are here to assist you manage these concerns and provide you access to a number of support services to help you through treatment. Therefore, if you are feeling anxious, please speak to a member of the team.

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 discuss your follow up arrangements with you at the completion of treatment.

Is it safe to take vitamin tablets and herbal medicines during treatment?

It is important you continue to take your medications as prescribed by your Radiation Oncologist. Before starting any new medicines, including prescription, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and alternative, natural or herbal medicines, please inform Treatment Staff or your Radiation Oncologist.

Please note that some vitamins (**Co-Enzyme Q, Vitamin C, Vitamin A or Vitamin E**) can interact with your treatment. Please consult with staff if you are taking any of these.

What time will my appointments be?

You will receive a copy of your schedule on your first day of treatment. Due to limited appointment times available we are unable to meet specific time requests unless these are needed for exceptional circumstances. Please discuss your circumstances with staff as soon as possible.

Please also note - at KKC we strive to create an environment that is respectful, supportive and encouraging. Therefore, we have a **zero-tolerance policy for physical or verbal abuse**. We recognise that all patients, family/whānau and staff have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and this is the type of communication we encourage.

It is mandatory to scan in using an approved NZ Covid tracer app if you have a smartphone or device when entering KKC. Please do so as you enter the building. Please ensure your support person also scans or signs in manually on the register provided.

During Covid Alert Levels 3 and 4 it is our policy that support people are not permitted in the building. Please adhere to these rules during these periods.
