

# End of Head and Neck Treatment Frequently Asked Questions



## Post-Treatment Appointments

You will be given a follow-up appointment to see your radiation oncologist in a few weeks or months.

Follow-up imaging will be scheduled about 3 months after completing your treatment. If any physician requests you have a biopsy done on the area that received radiation, please contact your radiation oncologist prior to doing so. Please follow up with other members of your health care team involved in your cancer care.

## When will I follow up with my dentist?

- Please schedule a follow-up visit with your dentist in about 2 to 3 months. This appointment is very important to preserve your dental health. You should see your dentist at least once every 3 to 6 months for the first year.
- Should you have the need for teeth extractions at any point after your treatment, please have your dentist contact us to discuss risks/benefits.

## Side Effects and Symptom Management

- Symptoms related to your treatment may last for weeks or months after your treatment is complete.
- Your symptoms may initially worsen but will gradually improve over the next few weeks.
- Common post-treatment side effects include:
  - **Skin reactions** due to radiation treatment may initially worsen but will gradually improve over the next 2 to 4 weeks. Be gentle when showering or bathing. Cleanse skin daily with gentle soap. Continue to apply Aquaphor to the treatment area twice daily.
  - **Dry mouth/saliva changes:** These will gradually improve over the next few months to a year. For thick saliva, continue using guaifenesin (products like Robitussin or Mucinex). Continue to do the salt and baking soda rinses as needed. There are also over-the-counter products such as Biotene and XyliMelts available for dry mouth management.
  - **Teeth problems:** Your teeth may be at greater risk for cavities and decay after treatment. Please continue to use fluoride treatments daily.
  - **Taste changes:** Treatment may alter your sense of taste. This should improve over the next few months to a year after treatment.
  - **Hair loss:** Hair will usually grow back 3 to 6 months following treatment.
  - **Pain** may worsen the week after radiation but will gradually improve over the next few weeks. Continue pain medications as directed by your radiation oncologist.
  - **Fatigue:** Take rest periods and get plenty of sleep during your recovery period.
  - **Swallowing:** If you have been seen by a speech therapist during treatment, it is very important that you continue your swallowing exercises.
  - **Neck swelling:** Please contact us if you develop any swelling or stiffness to the head/neck region.

***If any of your symptoms worsen, do not improve, or you experience new symptoms, contact the clinic via MyChart message or call your radiation oncology nurse for further direction at [214-645-8525](tel:214-645-8525).***

## Diet

- A well-balanced diet and adequate water intake are essential to your recovery after radiation therapy.
- Maintain your calorie and protein intake.
- Gradually modify your diet back to a normal diet for you. Please take into consideration any swallowing restrictions you may have received from your speech therapist.
- If you require supplemental nutrition, please follow your dietitian's guidelines.
- Please check with your oncology team before you resume your vitamins and supplements that were discontinued prior to treatment.

## Medications

- Never stop or change your medications without consulting your doctor first.
- Review your current prescription status and whether any refills are necessary.

## Exercise

- Low impact exercises, such as walking, are encouraged. Before exercising, please check first with your physician.

## Emotional Well-Being

Every person reacts differently to treatment. You may experience anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, fear, or helplessness. If you start to experience severe depression or suicidal thoughts, please seek immediate medical attention.

***Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255***

***Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741***

**Notes:**

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