



## Long term side-effects after radiotherapy for skin (cutaneous) cancer

This information provides some advice for patients who may have long term side-effects following radiotherapy for skin cancer (i.e. after 6 months).

Listed below are the possible side-effects:

- Changes in pigmentation  
After radiotherapy to the skin it is common to see darker more deeply pigmented skin (hyperpigmentation) in the treated area. After months/years this area of skin may become paler in colour (hypopigmented) than the untreated skin nearby.
- Hair loss  
It is common to have hair loss in the area that has been treated. Often this hair loss will be permanent.
- Skin atrophy and scarring  
In the months after radiotherapy to the skin the treated area can lose its natural elasticity (atrophy). It may become thin and more fragile. It is important that you follow the advice given to you about looking after your skin in the sun.
- Telangiectasia  
Radiotherapy to the skin may result in small blood vessels becoming visible on the treated skin surface (thread veins or telangiectasia). If they develop they are likely to be permanent.
- Cataract  
If you are having radiotherapy to the skin close to your eyes, you are likely to need lead shielding during your radiotherapy. The radiographer will make sure this is in place for every treatment. This reduces the risk of a cataract forming which may develop many months/years after your treatment. If you do develop a cataract it is usually possible for it to be removed by surgery.
- Blocked tear ducts (nasolacrimal duct stenosis)  
Radiotherapy to the eye/nasal bridge may cause the tear duct sited at the corner of the eye to become blocked. This may result in a watery eye. This is an uncommon effect of radiotherapy. A surgical procedure to open the tear duct may be possible.
- Dry eye  
If you have radiotherapy to the outer aspect of the eye it is possible that in the months after treatment the eye will become dry. If this may happen to you, your doctor will discuss it when you have your planning appointment.
- Cartilage necrosis  
An uncommon late effect of radiotherapy to the nose and ears can be damage to the cartilage. In some cases this may require surgery. If you need to have treatment to these sites your doctor may give you more treatments, but at a lower dose. This will reduce the risk of this happening.
- Secondary cancer (malignancy)  
Secondary cancer is a rare effect of radiotherapy (less than 1 in 1000). It is not usually seen until 20-30 years after treatment.

If you have any questions about any of this information please discuss them with your doctor or nurse specialist.

