

Patient Education

## Radiation Medicine Department

# Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma: Treatment

Treatment

Your doctor will develop a treatment plan to fit your individual needs.

Treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma depends on the stage of the disease, the type of cells involved, whether they are indolent or aggressive, and the age and general health of the patient.

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is usually treated with:

- Chemotherapy
- Radiation Therapy
- Combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy
- In some cases, bone marrow transplantation, biological therapies, or surgery may be options.
- For indolent lymphomas, the doctor may decide to wait until the disease causes symptoms before starting treatment. Often, this approach is called "watchful waiting."

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy are the most common treatments for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, although bone marrow transplantation, biological therapies, or surgery are sometimes used.

**Chemotherapy** is the use of drugs to kill cancer cells. Chemotherapy for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma usually consists of a combination of several drugs.

**Bone marrow transplantation (BMT)** may also be a treatment option, especially for patients whose non-Hodgkin's lymphoma has recurred (come back). BMT provides the patient with healthy stem cells (very immature cells that produce blood cells).

Radiation  
Therapy

**Radiation Therapy** is the use of high-energy rays to kill cancer cells. Treatment with radiation may be given alone or with chemotherapy.

Sometimes patients are given chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy to kill undetected cancer cells that may be present in the central nervous system (CNS). This treatment is called central nervous system prophylaxis.

Radiation therapy is local treatment; it affects cancer cells only in the treated area.

These are some questions you may want to ask your doctor before treatment begins:

- What kind of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma do I have?
- What is the stage of the disease?
- What are my treatment choices? Which do you recommend for me? Why?
- What are the risks and possible side effects of treatment?
- What side effects should I report to you?
- How long will treatment last?
- What are the chances that the treatment will be successful?
- Will treatment affect my normal activities? If so, for how long?
- Are new treatments under study? Would a clinical trial be appropriate for me?
- What is the treatment likely to cost?

You do not need to ask all your questions at one time. You will have other chances to ask the doctor to explain things and to get more information.

## Side Effects

The side effects of cancer treatment depend on the type of treatment and may be different for each person. Side effects are often only temporary.

Doctors and nurses can explain the possible side effects of treatment, and they can suggest ways to help relieve symptoms that may occur during and after treatment.

## Side Effects of Radiation Therapy

The side effects of radiation depend on the treatment dose and the part of the body that is treated. Although the side effects of radiation therapy can be difficult, they can usually be treated or controlled. It may also help to know that, in most cases, side effects are not permanent.

### **Fatigue**

- During radiation therapy, people are likely to become extremely tired, especially in the later weeks of treatment. Rest is important, but doctors usually advise patients to try to stay as active as they can.

### **Hair Loss**

- It is common to lose hair in the treated area and for the skin to become red, dry, tender, or itchy. There may also be permanent darkening or "bronzing" of the skin in the treated area.

**Sore Throat**

- When the chest and neck are treated, patients may have a dry, sore throat and trouble swallowing.

**Numbness/Tingling**

- Some patients may have tingling or numbness in their arms, legs, and lower back.

**Nausea/Vomiting/Diarrhea**

- Radiation therapy to the abdomen may cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or urinary discomfort. Often, changes in diet or medicine can ease these problems.

**Weakened Immune System**

- Radiation therapy also may cause a decrease in the number of white blood cells, cells that help protect the body against infection. If that happens, you need to be careful to avoid possible sources of infection. Your doctor may monitor your blood count during radiation therapy. In some cases, treatment may have to be postponed to allow blood counts to recover.

**Long-term Effects**

You should discuss with your doctor any possible long-term effects of radiation treatment on fertility and the increased chance of second cancers after treatment is over.

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