

Should I go back to my own dentist?

Yes, it is very important that you maintain excellent oral hygiene and regular dental visits must be a priority.

What if I need to have teeth out in the future?

You must make sure your dentist knows about your history of radiotherapy before carrying out any extractions in the future. Depending on the tooth to be extracted, you may be referred to a hospital dental department.

Golden rules to prevent tooth decay

- Brush your teeth twice daily with a fluoride containing toothpaste, always 'spit don't rinse' after brushing your teeth.
- Reduce frequency of intake of sugary foods and drinks.
- Limit the consumption of sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

Useful contact information

Shelley Oliver

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Anne Twomey

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Anne Hope

Network Macmillan Head & Neck Clinical Nurse Specialist
St Lukes Cancer Centre
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Portsmouth Road
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Key reference source:

www.mouthcancerfoundation.org

Royal Surrey County Hospital (RSCH) NHS Foundation Trust fully subscribes to the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) *Being Open* best practice framework, November 2010.

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm
Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Dental care for patients undergoing radiotherapy for head and neck cancer



Maxillo Facial Department

Why do I need to see a dentist?

All patients who are to receive radiotherapy as part of their treatment have a pre treatment dental assessment – including X-Rays. The aim of this assessment is to identify and then either eliminate or stabilise dental disease in order to minimise complications arising in your mouth during or after cancer treatment.

What treatment am I likely to need and will I need any teeth removed?

This will depend on the condition of your teeth at the time of the assessment.

Radiotherapy increases the risk of a condition called osteoradionecrosis which is painful and very difficult to treat.

To reduce the chance of developing this condition it is important to avoid tooth extraction after radiotherapy by extracting any potentially problematic teeth prior to commencing radiotherapy.

The dentist may also recommend some simple fillings, removal of sharp or rough edges on teeth or dentures and dental hygienist visits in order to keep the remaining teeth healthy.

Who will carry out the treatment?

If you have been advised to have dental extractions we recommend these are carried out at the Royal Surrey County Hospital. Any fillings or hygiene visits that you require can be carried out by your regular dentist. If you do not have a regular dentist we can advise you how to access NHS dental treatment.

How much will it cost?

Any extractions carried out at the Royal Surrey County Hospital attract no charge. If you are seen at a local NHS Clinic the relevant NHS charges will apply. If you see your own regular dentist the appropriate fee must be paid to that practice.

How am I able to help myself?

The dentist will have advised you on your own personal dental health care programme. This might include the use of high fluoride containing toothpaste, using alcohol free fluoride containing mouthwash, sucking sugar free sweets or chewing sugar free chewing gum. Above all, it is important that you maintain a very high standard of oral hygiene both during and after your treatment.

The Timeframe

Appointment at the Royal Surrey County Hospital with restorative dentist for personalised advice.

Within 1 week

Any necessary dental extractions

After 1 week

Radiotherapy planning then...

Up to 2 weeks later

Radiotherapy treatment commences

On completion of radiotherapy

Review by Head and Neck Clinic

Following radiotherapy

Maintenance of dental health with own general dental practitioner

FAQ's about your dental health and treatment

What changes should I expect in my mouth as a result of radiotherapy?

Following radiotherapy you may notice a reduction in the amount of saliva you produce, leading to you experiencing a dry mouth. This in turn can cause an increase in dental decay, increased risk of infections developing in your mouth as well as areas of soreness. You may also notice an alteration in taste.

When will the effects of radiotherapy wear off?

Some effects wear off once the radiotherapy has finished. Others, such as dry mouth may last much longer. This may depend on the site of your tumour and therefore the area that has been treated with radiotherapy. The effects of radiotherapy on your jaws will remain for life, so it is very important that you always inform your dentist of your history of radiotherapy.

How does radiotherapy affect my teeth?

Because radiotherapy can lead to you having a dry mouth you are much more prone to dental decay and gum infections.

If I need to have my teeth extracted before radiotherapy can I have some dentures made?

Yes, but not for at least 6 months after radiotherapy has finished, sometimes longer. This is to make sure your gums have had sufficient time to heal after the extractions and radiotherapy. The dentures should be made by your own dentist – if you do not have a regular dentist we can advise you where you can access NHS care.