

## What happens when treatment is finished?

Your symptoms may start to improve 2-3 weeks after treatment. This depends on many factors such as the location and size of your cancer and the type of treatment you have had. You may continue to see the speech pathologist after treatment if your symptoms continue to affect your eating, drinking and/or communication.

### Other notes:

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### Your speech pathologist is:

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

### Resources

Qld Health web site  
The Cancer Council of Queensland  
[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk)

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### Acknowledgements:

Funding provided by Allied Health Training and Development Cancer Care Initiative (January 2008)  
Developed by Speech Pathology Department Princess Alexandra Hospital (June 2008)  
Radiation Oncology Department at Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane, QLD, for advice regarding the content of these brochures  
Speech Pathologists Australia-wide who have contributed to the proofreading and content of these brochures

# Speech Pathology and Radiation Oncology

## Cancer of the Head and Neck



health · care · people



Queensland Government



## What is cancer of the head and neck?

Head and neck cancer is a cancer that arises from cells in the nasal cavity, sinuses, lips, mouth, salivary glands, throat, or larynx [voice box]. Cancer is a disorder of cell growth that may prevent cells from performing their normal functions. Normally cells grow and reproduce in an orderly manner. Sometimes this process is disrupted, and the cells develop into a lump which is called a tumour.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC) is a common type of cancer of the head and neck. These cells may grow to form a bulky mass within areas of the head and neck and result in speech, voice and swallowing difficulties.

## Why do I need to see a speech pathologist?

The speech pathologist is a specialist in speech, voice and swallowing difficulties. During chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy you may experience the following difficulties:

- Difficulty swallowing due to the location and size of the cancer
- Swelling of the mouth and throat caused by treatment
- Soreness of the mouth and throat, and pain when swallowing
- Dry mouth or thick saliva due to changes in your saliva
- Reduced jaw opening (trismus)
- Loss of taste
- Voice changes

If you have any of these discuss them with your speech pathologist, doctor, nurse, and dietitian.

## When will I see the Speech Pathologist?

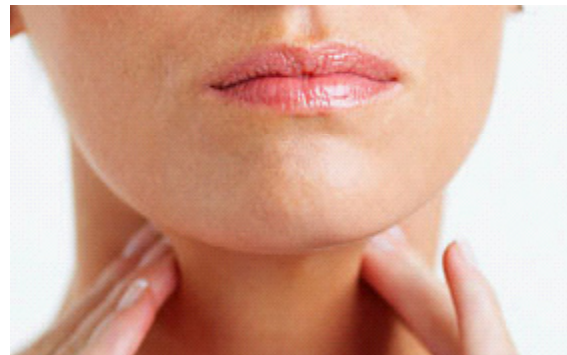
The speech pathologist may see you alone or in a joint clinic with the dietitian either before, during or after your treatment. In these sessions you will be asked what you can eat and drink and what side effects you may be experiencing. You may be provided with suggestions on how to eat and drink safely to maintain your fluid and nutritional needs.

## Radiation therapy of the head and neck

Side effects from radiation therapy to the head and neck may develop after the first 2-3 weeks of treatment.

It is common for your throat to start feeling sore and you may feel like there is a “lump” in your throat. You may also notice a change in your voice. These are normal side effects during the course of your treatment.

As the treatment course progresses you may have increased difficulty in swallowing food and liquids. If you find that your throat is too sore to swallow food, please inform the doctor, nursing staff and speech pathologist.



## Radiation therapy to the mouth and face

Side effects of radiation therapy to the mouth and face may also develop after the first 2-3 weeks of treatment. Symptoms can start with dryness of the mouth, thickening of saliva, pain, and taste changes. It is important to pay attention to oral hygiene at this point ensuring regular mouth washes and teeth brushing. Nursing and dental staff will give you advice on this before treatment starts. (Refer to the brochure on Mouth Care for more information).

As treatment continues you may find it difficult to maintain your weight. This may be due to loss of taste, appetite changes, and pain when eating and drinking.

Stick to soft and moist foods. If you find that your throat is too sore to swallow food, please inform your doctor, nurse, speech pathologist and dietitian who can help you with this. Refer to the brochure on Swallowing problems (Dysphagia) for more information.