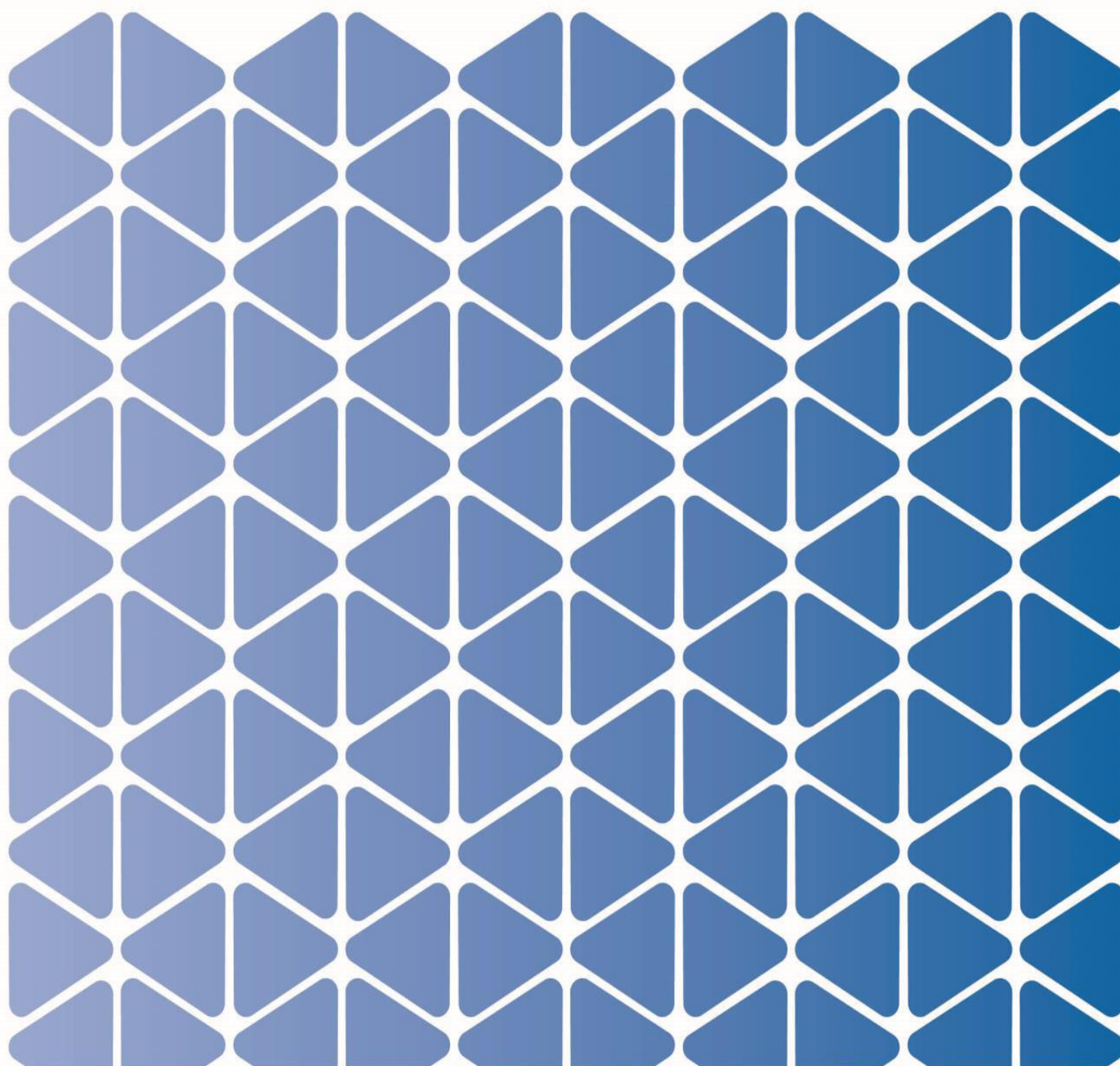


PATIENT INFORMATION

# Eat All Through (EAT) Radiation Treatment



Radiotherapy has side effects that can affect your eating, drinking and swallowing (dysphagia). Common side effects of radiotherapy include dry mouth, pain, taste changes and ulcers which can make it difficult to eat and drinking, especially as your treatment progresses. The severity of the side effects depend on the area treated with radiation and the treatment dose you receive. Every patient is different. Swallowing problems can develop during treatment, and long after your treatment has finished.

Radiotherapy particularly affects the muscles involved in swallowing due to the risk of scar tissue formation. These muscles help to move liquids and food through the mouth and your throat safely. It is crucial that you keep your swallowing muscles **active and flexible** to prevent long term swallow damage. You can keep your swallowing muscles strong and flexible by continuing to eat all the way through your treatment. Foods that are thicker or heavier are good exercise for your throat.



Adapted with thanks from University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire

The EAT staircase is designed to help you to safely eat the most challenging foods you can throughout each stage of your radiation.

Think of the type of food you eat as exercise for your throat muscles. The EAT ladder starts with the most difficult and challenging foods at the top and goes down to the least challenging at the bottom.

The idea is that you stay as close to the top of the ladder as possible throughout your treatment. Your aim is to gradually work your way down the ladder step by step as needed, rather than jumping down the ladder quickly so that your swallowing muscles stay flexible and strong for as long as possible.

Your Speech & Language Therapist will help you navigate the ladder and give you advice regarding your swallowing.

It is recommended you set a **mealtime routine** to help you **Eat All Through** treatment.

- Use the EAT ladder to help you to choose the most difficult level of food you are able to swallow with your side effects.
- Take pain relief 20-30 minutes prior to mealtimes.
- Mouth care: use a saltwater and bicarbonate of soda mouth rinse to gargle and clear mucous from your throat prior to mealtimes.
- If your doctor has prescribed a medicated pain rinse to numb your mouth, swill and spit prior to mealtimes.
- Your taste will change. Taste and smell are closely related. Try to smell your food prior to eating to enhance your taste, if you aren't feeling nauseous.
- As you progress through your treatment, you may feel solid foods sticking in your throat. You may need a drink to wash food through your throat but try first to do a hard, fast swallow.
- Clean your mouth well after eating. Use a soft, baby toothbrush as tolerated.
- If you have a feeding tube, eat first, then top up using the tube (as advised by our dietitian). If you use the tube first, you may feel full sooner and not eat as much.
- Do regular swallow exercises as provided by your Speech & Language Therapist.



Adapted with thanks from University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire

Please contact Speech & Language Therapy on 0246 966449 if you have any further questions.

**If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.**

### **Patient Experience**

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

### **Feedback**

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

### **How to contact PALS:**

**Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: [wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net)**

### **Opening times:**

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.