



Useful numbers

- Waikato Hospital switchboard
07 839 8899
- Oncology nurses
Ext: 96803
- Head and Neck Nurse Specialist
Ext: 23031
- Oncology Outpatient Reception
07 839 8604

For more information please visit the following website:

<http://headandneck.org.nz/news/humidifiers-to-lessen-painful-side-effects>

Information on humidification at home for patients receiving external beam radiation therapy to the head and neck region



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Waikato Regional Cancer Centre



This information brochure provides an explanation on what a humidifier is and how it can aid in reducing some of the side effects from head and neck radiation therapy.

One major side effect of head and neck radiation treatment is mucositis, ulceration of the lining inside the mouth. This, alongside inflammation, increased production of mucous and reduced production of saliva, can be very painful and uncomfortable.

In addition to regular mouth-care and pain relief, a humidifier can also be beneficial.

What is a humidifier?



A humidifier is a machine that delivers warm, moist air to the airways, by adding moisture to the air that you naturally breathe.

Why is a humidifier beneficial?

A humidifier is a great tool for moistening the airway and soothing irritation, because it performs the job that your body would usually do itself.

When you breathe in through the mouth or nose, your body moistens and warms the air that is inhaled. This helps to thin out mucous, making it easier to cough it out rather than let it accumulate in the airways.

When a patient receives radiotherapy to/near the structures of the airway that perform this task, the lining of the mouth and oral cavity can become very red and inflamed - much like sunburn to the skin, and it can no longer perform this task.

By replacing this body's function with a humidifier, you are allowing the linings of your nose, mouth, and throat to remain moistened, so that the oral cavity can continue as normal, and reduce discomfort. With fewer symptoms of dryness and pain, you will sleep better, cough less, find it easier to swallow, and eliminate mucous sufficiently, which will aid in your overall recovery from your radiation therapy treatment.

What are the disadvantages of using a humidifier?

The only known disadvantage to using a humidifier is difficulty adjusting to using the machine itself, which can lead to non-compliance.

The airflow of the humidifier is quite strong, and heats up to the equivalent of our body temperature (37°C). Some people can find this uncomfortable and difficult to adjust to, especially when trying to sleep, due to the strength and warmth of the flow into the nasal cavity.

We strongly recommend that you try to use your humidifier regularly for at least one week, to allow yourself to adjust to the machine.

Using the humidifier

How/when do I use the humidifier?

The nurse will provide you with all of the equipment you need to use the humidifier at home, along with an education session on how to assemble and use the machine itself.

There will be an instruction booklet in the carry case itself. Most patients find this machine relatively easy to use, however we will make sure you are comfortable using it before sending you home with it.

It is recommended that you use the humidifier whenever you are sleeping or are sitting down at

rest for long periods of time, e.g. when watching TV.

Try to use it for longer than 30 minutes at a time, as prolonged use will give you the best chance of symptom relief.



The machine will be loaned to you for a period of between six and ten weeks during/after your radiation therapy treatment.