

Your heart

Health information after cancer treatment as a child or teenager

You have been given this information sheet because you had chemotherapy or radiation to your chest that may affect your heart. This information is important for you to know and refer to in the future.

Certain drugs and radiotherapy (radiation) to the chest may affect your heart after treatment is finished. This can happen soon after treatment, later in life, or not at all.

What are the chemotherapy drugs that can affect my heart?

Targeted therapies, including a group of drugs called **anthracyclines**, can affect the heart. The chemotherapy drugs used the most in paediatric oncology that can affect your heart are:

- Doxorubicin
- Daunorubicin
- Epirubicin
- Idarubicin
- Mitoxantrone

The affect of these drugs on the heart is related to the amount of medication received.



Everyone is different, so discuss the treatment you had with your healthcare team.

How can chemotherapy drugs affect my heart?

High dose chemotherapy drugs can cause damage to the muscle cells of the heart. This medical condition is called **cardiomyopathy** and is usually treated with medication if diagnosed.



How can radiation to the chest affect my heart?

Most people who have radiation to the chest will not have a problem, but for some, high-dose radiation can damage the heart muscle, heart valves or coronary arteries. So it is important to monitor your heart health .



How will I know if my heart is affected?

You may need regular monitoring to check your heart. Your treating team and the Long Term Follow-up Program will talk to you about the treatment you had. They will give you a **'treatment summary'** and a **'roadmap'** to let you know about any tests (such as an ultrasound or echocardiogram) and when they are needed.



It is **important you have a good GP** who knows your health history. It is recommended you have a routine health check at least once a year, especially once you have been discharged from The Long Term Follow-up Program.

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Possible signs and symptoms of a heart problem

While symptoms vary, they can include:

- chest pain
- irregular heartbeat
- blood pressure problems
- dizziness or fainting
- shortness of breath, especially at night when lying flat
- unexpected shortness of breath during exercise
- increased tiredness or fatigue
- swelling of the ankles.



If you experience any of these symptoms see your doctor and let your clinical team know.

What happens during pregnancy?

During pregnancy your heart works a little harder. If you become pregnant, or are considering becoming pregnant, chat to your GP/Obstetrician. Depending on your treatment, they may suggest some extra monitoring or testing during pregnancy or labour.



Current recommendations during pregnancy:

- Include a medical doctor (Obstetrician or GP) in your pregnancy care team.
- Share your treatment summary with your healthcare team so they know what treatments you had.
- Even if your heart is fine during your first pregnancy, it is still important to monitor your heart during other pregnancies.

What can I do to stay healthy?

Keeping healthy is important for everyone whether they have had cancer or not. Making healthy choices now will have a positive effect on your health for the rest of your life. To keep your heart healthy:



- Take care of yourself by **keeping fit**, having a **healthy diet**, and maintaining a **healthy weight**.
- **Regular exercise** is good for you and your heart, however, **check with your clinical team or GP** before you start any high-intensity exercise e.g., long-distance running, or heavy weightlifting (weightlifting with high repetition low weights is usually okay).
- Have **regular health checks** (especially after discharge from the Long Term Follow-up Program) to help **monitor for risks** such as hypertension (high blood pressure) and diabetes.
- **Visit your dentist** regularly as poor dental health increases the risk of infection in the bloodstream which can affect the heart valves.
- **Avoid recreational drugs** like cocaine which can cause abnormalities in heart rhythm, especially in a heart affected by anthracyclines or radiation.
- Smoking increases the risk of a heart attack. **DON'T smoke!**
- Your **treatment summary and roadmap** are personal to you. It is really important you **share these with your healthcare providers** so they understand your health history and can monitor your heart health.

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Where can I find out more information?

www.heartfoundation.org.au/index.htm
www.healthdirect.gov.au/cardiomyopathy
www.cmaa.org.au/

