

Editorial for March 2013

Radiation Treatment and Homoeopathy

India faces the challenges of increase in cancer cases every year by approximately ten lakh, at least one fourth will at some stage or other will go for radiation therapy.

Now the question is do we have in homoeopathy to support the radiation treatment? My answer is yes we do, the problem is with concomitant radiotherapy along with homoeopathy sometimes poses a difficult situation for a homoeopath to evaluate the case.

In my clinic I see two kinds of people one without ongoing radiation but having history of complication due to radiation and the others who are undergoing radiation along with homoeopathy.

Let's examine the first group:

Patients who are not on radiation at present but had it in the past and are now coming for side effects.

This constitutes around 15 percent of my cancer patients.

Most patients receiving radiation treatment are able to complete their therapy without significant difficulty. The chance of experiencing side effects varies greatly among individuals. A radiation dose that causes discomfort in one person may cause no side effects in others.

Although you do not feel anything during a radiation treatment, the effects of radiation build gradually over time. Most patients have very few side effects at first; however, many experience fatigue as treatment continues. When other side effects occur, they are typically limited to the areas receiving treatment.

In majority the side effects are temporary and they disappear after the therapy is completed,

I see the most common side effects in my clinic is: skin reaction and fatigue

Skin Reaction

Let's discuss skin reaction which is most common. The skin reaction can range from mild redness and dryness to severe desquamation. Majority of people have severe aggravation of their skin complaints from exposure to sun.

At this time if the complaints are very acute do use an acute remedy the most useful will be Radium Bromide, Bufo, Lachesis, Phosphorous, Cadmium Iodide, Cantharis, I. The list is not complete after all it depends on the symptoms. Regarding posology use low potency like 6c or 12c or best is use Q potency, use frequent repetition as the dose will get exhausted very fast.

I do use some home remedies locally to alleviate the symptoms of radiation burns to some extent. E.g. applying gel from Aloe Vera leaves directly on the burns, if leaves are not available then buying an Aloe Vera gel from a pharmacy will also do., not only does the gel help in providing soothing, cooling relief to the affected area, but it also enhances the healing process. Another home remedy I use which I learned from my latin American homoeopaths is using bananas to gain relief from radiation burns. Take an overripe banana, mash it and apply the paste to the affected areas. You will need to leave the application on for around 15 minutes and then rinse it off. This remedy would be beneficial in eliminating the pain and heat emanating from the burn. You may repeat the paste at least 3-4 times a day.

My naturopathic friends from India taught me to use Spirulina are also known to be quite effective in treating radiation burns internally. The herb can be consumed in the form of tablets as these are believed to be highly beneficial in treating the burns. Himalaya company manufactures this in India. Some Parsi patients have taught me to apply a paste prepared from sandalwood powder, turmeric powder and a bit of olive oil, which will help in giving the mixture a pasty texture is also useful in treating radiation burns. This paste is to be applied on the affected areas as it will help to heal the burns and will also provide much-needed relief from the burning sensation that accompanies these burns.

Fatigue

The second common side effect in this group is weakness and fatigue, some patients may use different expressions like tiredness, weariness, exhaustion, or a profound lack of energy. Fatigue is typically more severe two to four hours after treatment.

One need to treat the patient constitutionally and not any local remedy, however some remedies that I have found useful are Aletris farinose, Sumbul, Cobalt Nitricum etc. Regarding posology use 12 c or 30c or Q potency and repeat the medicine very frequently.

The following home remedies have been very useful to me. 1 cup beetroot juice, 1 cup of apple juice, mixed with either sugar or honey once a day, a ripe banana with 1 tsp of honey 2 times a day, 1 cup of mixture of apple and tomato juice 2 times a day. Drinking 1 stf 2 times a day honey is very good it helps increase the stamina. Eating 4-5 dates daily to replenish the lost energy.

Now let's examine the second group:

The second group consists of patients who are on radiotherapy along with homoeopathy and are having multiple side effects.

In head and neck area I frequently see: mucositis, xerostomia, changed sense of taste and smell, and Hair loss

In stomach and abdomen area I see nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea and loss of appetite.

As a systemic complication I see low blood counts (myelosuppression)

I will now explain in brief how I tackle the complications, let's start with

Mucositis (sore mouth or throat)

Radiation therapy that is delivered to the head and neck area may cause mucositis. Mucositis is inflammation of the lining of the mouth and throat, the mucous membranes. When radiation is administered directly to or near the head and neck, chest, abdomen, or

anal-rectal regions, it may cause damage to the mucosal lining of the entire gastrointestinal tract. This results in inflammation and sloughing of the mucosal cells, causing pain and increasing the risk of infection.

The treatment still remains constitutional but if mucositis is extreme then one may need an acute remedy, some useful remedy in my practice are Kali chlor, Hydrastis, Sulphuric Acid, Hydrastin Mur etc.

Some home remedies are very useful plain orange juice diluted with water in equal proportion every few hours, even carrot juice can be taken in a similar way. Another good remedy is Tumor seeds are available with grocers. When placed on the tongue, they have a cooling effect. Grind the seeds into a fine powder and use it for stomatitis. Spit out after a while. Do it three times every day. This will help in controlling stomatitis. Also one may rinse the mouth with the juice of bitter melon. You may heat the juice of bitter melon a bit, add a little alum salt and gargle. It will cure stomatitis. Turmeric when taken in a 1 tsf with hot milk or hot water at bed time is very useful.

Xerostomia (dry mouth)

Xerostomia is a chronic dry-mouth condition caused by damage to the salivary glands. Xerostomia can have a negative effect on quality of life by greatly impairing a patient's ability to speak, chew, swallow, and taste.

Some useful remedies in my practice is Arsenic, Mercurialis Perennis, Nux Moshchata, Rhus Radicans etc.

Some home remedies helpful to me are: warm gargle of a mixture containing a glass of water and half teaspoon of turmeric, done 2-3 times a day. Or eating celery sticks at least 2-3 a day. Or a gargle of fennel seeds and aniseeds soaked overnight in water. Another useful hint is to suck a lemon. It will stimulate the salivary glands.

Changed sense of taste and/or smell

Radiation therapy or cancer itself may cause a change of taste or smell. Foods may have a bitter or metallic taste, or simply less taste.

Again treatment as far as possible has to be constitutional but if in rare occasion the symptoms are very acute then the following remedies Cantharis, Nux Moshchata, Zincum Metallicum etc.

Hair loss

Radiation therapy causes hair loss only in the area being treated. Hair loss typically begins 2 to 4 weeks after treatment begins. Some individuals experience thinning of the hair, while others experience complete hair loss.

This should always be treated with constitutionally medicine, following diet and home remedies are very useful. Prepare the hair oil in the manner given below Pour 1 cup of coconut oil into a saucepan. Put the pan on the stove and set it to medium heat. Chop Amla into 1/4 inch pieces while the coconut oil heats up. Amla is a type of fruit that is also referred to as Indian gooseberry. Once the oil has begun to boil, add your Amla to the saucepan. Stir the concoction every 30 seconds for about five minutes. After five minutes has passed, turn the heat off and let the liquid cool down to room temperature. To speed this process, you can place it in your refrigerator. Rub the solution into your scalp once it has completely cooled down. Let it sit on your head for 45 minutes to an hour. After the time has passed, rinse the solution off with cool water and gently pat dry. You can repeat this as often as you would normally wash your hair, but once a day to every other day is recommended.

Also eating salmon, walnut, using walnut oil as salad dressing, oysters, sweet potatoes, lentils, blue berries, tomatoes and strawberries.

Nausea/vomiting

Sometimes radiation therapy causes nausea (feeling queasy or sick to your stomach) and/or vomiting (throwing up), especially when the radiation is delivered to the abdominal area. Nausea and vomiting can happen immediately after radiation, can be delayed, or can occur in anticipation of receiving treatment.

Here many times I do use acute remedies as reaction can be very violent drugs like Okubaka, Digitalis, Ipecac, Tabacum, Secale –cor, Antimony –crud, Bismuth etc. Here start

with medium potency like 200c every few hours. Some home remedies useful to me are as follows: Aniseed seeds, Cinnamon powder, Clove, Cumin seeds, Fennel seed all these can be taken individually in concoction with boiling water and drinking it in sips. Sucking ginger candies or drinking ginger tea is equally good.

Diarrhea

Radiation treatment that is delivered to the abdominal area can cause diarrhea, which usually begins in the third or fourth week of therapy. As soon as diarrhea starts, switch to a clear liquid diet. Avoid foods that are high in fiber or can cause cramps or a gassy feeling (raw vegetables, coffee, beans, cabbage, spicy food). Avoid dairy products. Eat foods that are high in potassium, such as bananas, potatoes, and apricots, because diarrhea causes potassium loss.

Useful remedies in my practice are Cardus-mar, China, Phosphoric acid etc.

Low blood counts (myelosuppression)

Blood counts, or the number of blood cells in circulation, can be affected by radiation therapy.

This needs to be always treated by constitutional homoeopathic remedies.

Herbal remedies like Papaya leaves are high in complex vitamins, and when taken in the form of juice it also helps the bone marrow to increase the production of blood count. Aloe vera juice is very helpful in increasing the blood count. Take 30 ml of Aloe vera juice after every meal.