

## The Heart



Certain drugs may have effects some time after treatment is finished and one group of drugs that may cause problems with your heart are the anthracyclines (the red drug). As you had one of these drugs and/or radiation around the area of your heart it is important for you to know about this.

Anthracyclines and radiation not only damage and kill cancer cells but, unfortunately, they can also damage heart muscle cells. The heart usually makes up for this damage by working the healthy heart cells harder. As you grow and become more active your heart needs to do more work. Very rarely there is too little healthy heart muscle to pump the blood properly round the body and the heart finds it hard to keep up.

This problem can occur many years after the cancer treatment has finished. It can cause you to be unexpectedly short of breath, which you may notice climbing stairs or hills. If you develop these problems you need to see your doctor.

To check the heart a routine test is performed using ultrasound, this test is called an Echocardiogram. It is not foolproof but can give an idea how well the heart muscle is working.

High dose irradiation can also affect the blood vessels as well as the heart muscle. It may damage the lining of the blood vessels, which makes them more likely to form blood clots and blockages of the vessels. This may cause chest pain or an irregular heart beat. If you get symptoms like this you must see your doctor.

**Remember these problems are very rare.**

But if you become usually short of breath, have chest pain, palpitations or fainting you must see your doctor without delay.

- Regular exercise is good for you but before you start any intensive exercise training programmes, particularly weight lifting and body building programmes, check with your oncology centre.
- Pregnancy may be a time of extra stress on the heart. If you are considering becoming pregnant, or are already pregnant, make sure your maternity doctors know what treatment you had received. You will need regular ultrasounds of your heart during pregnancy and perhaps special monitoring during labour.
- **Smoking increases the risks of heart attack. Therefore DON'T smoke!**



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