

Information for patients receiving

# A Short Course or Single Treatment of Radiotherapy to the Chest



**The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre**  
1053 Great Western Road,  
Glasgow G12 0YN

**The Lanarkshire Beatson Cancer Centre**  
Monkscourt Avenue,  
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This leaflet is for patients who will have a short course or single treatment of radiotherapy to the chest area. It describes the radiotherapy planning and treatment and explains the effects that you may experience during and after treatment, and how best to cope with them.

The effects of treatment vary from one patient to another; therefore the information given here is intended as a general guide and does not mean that you will have all the effects described. Your doctor and radiographer will explain your treatment.

If you are in any doubt about anything or have any questions or problems, please let us know as soon as possible.



## **Preparation for Treatment**

Before radiotherapy begins the treatment must be carefully planned. This will take place at the CT simulator.

The couch in the CT simulator can be a little uncomfortable. If you find lying flat particularly difficult, it may be a good idea to take painkillers just before your appointment. We will ask you to undress to the waist. Your radiographers will ensure your dignity is maintained by covering you up whenever possible.



**Image 1- CT simulator**

The CT simulator is similar to a CT scanner. The area needing treatment will be scanned with you lying in the position necessary for your radiotherapy. If you are uncomfortable let your radiographers know and they will do their best to make you more comfortable. It is very important that you stay as still as you can during this time and try to relax and breathe normally. Once you are in the correct position, your radiographers will place temporary pen marks and stickers on your skin. The scan will take 2-3 minutes.

Once the scan is complete, your doctor or consultant radiographer will plan your radiotherapy treatment while you are lying on the CT scanner couch. This may take 10-20 minutes. During this time you do not need to stay still as your radiographers will place you back into the same position. Once your doctor or consultant radiographer has planned your treatment your radiographers will mark your skin, in the area to be treated, with a tiny permanent mark (tattoo).

You will have treatment the same day or within a few days of your CT simulator appointment.

If your planning and treatment appointment are on the same day, we would advise you bring someone with you if possible. You may be in the department for several hours. Please bring any medication with you that you may need.

## **Treatment**

You will have treatment on a Linear Accelerator, which is a special type of x-ray machine, which gives radiotherapy. The staff who operate these machines are called therapy radiographers.



**Image 2- Linear Accelerator**

When you arrive please report to reception before taking a seat in your waiting area. Your radiographers will explain everything to you before treatment starts. Your radiographers will position you just as you were when your treatment was planned at the CT simulator. When you are positioned correctly your radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on. You are carefully observed from outside the room on closed circuit TV.

The machine may be moved to more than one position to deliver your treatment. It may seem close but it won't touch you.

Your treatment is painless and usually takes around 5 -10 minutes. You will feel no different immediately afterwards. Check with the radiographers if you have any questions.

## **Effects of Treatment (early)**

It is important to remember that this is a general guide. Everyone is different and the effects may vary.

- **Tiredness:** You may feel tired, especially in the first few days after your treatment. Some people can feel a bit weak. Rest when you are tired. The tiredness may last for several weeks after treatment finishes.
- **Skin:** Your skin may become pink and itchy soon after the treatment. Continue to wash as usual but with tepid water. The reaction should settle within a few days and you can start to wash normally again.
- **Sore Throat:** If the area you had treated covers part of your throat, you may develop a sore throat or a feeling of a lump in your throat when you swallow. Your GP can give you some medicine to help this. These symptoms should settle down within a week.
- **Heartburn:** If the area you had treated covers part of your gullet, you may experience heartburn, which can sometimes be quite uncomfortable and may last several days. Ask your GP to assess your pain control and give you medication to help this. This will help you feel more comfortable.

- **Pain:** You may have some pain in your chest during the first 48 hours after your treatment. This should settle quite quickly. If you are not taking effective painkillers please ask your GP to review.
- **Breathlessness:** If you have been breathless before the treatment, this could become a little worse afterwards. Use your inhalers if you have them. If you are concerned call out your GP.
- **Cough:** Sometimes patients notice that their cough and/or spit become slightly worse during and after treatment. This should settle within a few weeks. If your spit becomes coloured (green/red) contact your GP to make sure you do not have an infection.
- You should not be sick with the treatment but some patients find that they feel slightly squeamish and go off their food for a few days. If nausea is a problem your doctor can prescribe something to help reduce the feeling of sickness.

Radiotherapy **only affects** the area of your body being treated.

## **General Advice**

- Although you may be feeling off your food, it is important to try to eat to maintain your strength. Facing three large main meals a day can be very difficult. Try having smaller meals or snacks more often. It can also help to serve your food on a smaller plate. If necessary, you can obtain food supplements from your GP.
- Keep drinking plenty of fluids as it is important that you don't become dehydrated. You might find thicker fluids such as milk or tomato juice easier to swallow than water.
- It also helps to avoid very hot or icy drinks, rough foods, strong spices and alcohol until things settle down after treatment has ended.

## **Skin care**

- Radiotherapy only affects the area of the body that we are treating. Bathe as normal, ensuring that the water is not too hot and pat your skin dry. If you feel that your skin in the affected area is dry, pink or itchy ask the radiographers for some cream or use a cream such as Diprobase or E45 (you can get this from the Chemist or your GP).
- Avoid exposing the treated area to sunshine during treatment. Thereafter use total sunblock on the area.

## **What do I do if I feel ill?**

If you suddenly feel unwell and not able to come for treatment, let your treatment room know and contact your GP. If you feel able to come in to the department, let the radiographers know you are unwell as soon as you arrive and they can arrange for a doctor to see you.

**If you become unwell after your treatment has finished you must contact your GP or contact NHS 24 on 111. If you experience sudden severe problems with your breathing go to Accident and Emergency or dial 999.**

## **After Treatment Ends**

Any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down. The tiredness can take several weeks to leave you. It's also important to remember that the full benefits of your treatment may take a number of weeks to be felt, and it may be a little while before you feel better. Our hope is that you will notice a gradual improvement in the days and weeks after your treatment has finished.

Your doctor will arrange to see you about 4-6 weeks after treatment is completed. Continue to try to eat and drink plenty of fluids and do as much as you feel able.

## **Where can I get Help?**

Many people already have had a lot of information and support from their own Lung Cancer or Macmillan Nurse Specialist at another hospital or in the community. Remember that they can also help you with any worries or concerns at this time, and because you know them already, they can provide invaluable help and support during and after your treatment. So please remember to give them a call if you need to.

## **Information & Support**

All our staff are here to make sure your treatment goes as smoothly as possible and will try to help with any questions or problems you may have. Further specialist help and information in the Beatson is available from:

- **Clinical Nurse Specialist in Lung Cancer (Beatson)**  
Tel: 0141 301 7601/7598
- **Information Radiographer & Counsellor**  
Tel: 0141 301 7423
- **Information and Support Radiographer**  
Tel: 0141 301 7427

The Macmillan Information & Support Centre is on Level 1 at the main entrance of the Beatson. They offer emotional support, information and signposting to services within and near to the Beatson and in your own local area. Open Monday to Friday 8.15am to 4.15pm. Please visit or phone on **0141 301 7390**.

The Beatson Cancer Centre has a Radiotherapy Advice Line available for patients who have completed treatment. This is an answer phone service, available Monday - Friday. Please leave your name, date of birth and telephone number and a radiographer will call you back as soon as possible.

**Tel: 0141 301 7432**

The Cancer Centre also has a **Cancer Treatment Helpline** for urgent calls. This is for patients on or within 6 weeks of treatment who have urgent or severe symptoms such as -

- Shivering or flu-like symptoms.
- Temperature greater than 37.5°C.
- Gum/nose bleeds or unusual bruising.
- Worsening or sudden breathlessness.
- Leg weakness/difficulty walking.
- Severe nausea/vomiting/diarrhoea/constipation.
- Sudden increases or uncontrolled pain.
- Other concerning symptoms associated with your cancer treatment.

The line is available 24 hours for emergencies, although it would be helpful if you called early in the day if this is at all possible.

### **For Urgent Calls:**

**Beatson 8am-8pm Tel: 0141 301 7990**

**National 8pm-8am Tel: 0800 917 7711**

## **Counselling & Clinical Psychology**

This leaflet deals with the physical aspects of your treatment, but your emotional well-being is just as important to us.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be a distressing time for you and those closest to you. At times it can also be difficult coping with treatment but you don't have to cope on your own. Within the department, we have a counselling and clinical psychology service that may be able to help with worries and difficulties you might be having before during or after treatment.

There are also voluntary organisations providing information and support. These include:

- **Roy Castle Lung Foundation**  
**Helpline 0333 323 7200**  
**[www.roycastle.org](http://www.roycastle.org)**  
Providing information and support for those affected by lung cancer.
- **Macmillan Cancer Support. 0808 808 0000**  
**[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**  
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.
- **Maggie's Gartnavel : 0141 330 3311**
- **Maggie's Lanarkshire, Monklands Hospital**  
**01236 771199**
- **Maggie's Forth Valley: 01324 868069**  
Provides information and support with a regular programme of courses. Counselling service available
- **Cancer Support Scotland – (Tak Tent), The Calman Centre, Gartnavel Complex.**  
**Freephone 0800 652 4531 or 0141 337 8199.**  
Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups. Complementary therapies available.  
**[www.cancersupportscotland.org](http://www.cancersupportscotland.org)**
- **Smokeline 0800 84 84 84 or visit**  
**<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/stopping-smoking>**  
Provides support and guidance to help you stop smoking.
- **British Lung Foundation: Helpline 03000 030 555 or visit [www.blf.org.uk](http://www.blf.org.uk)**  
Provides information and publications.

- **Macmillan Benefits Team (within the Beatson)**  
**0141 301 7374**  
Provides free and confidential advice for people affected by cancer and their carers.
- **Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre –**  
if you want to find out more about our Centre please visit  
**[www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk)**
- **NHS 24 111**

Original Leaflet prepared by L Webster  
Revised by H. Reid September 2019  
QA Approved by L. Webster/ H. Reid  
Review date September 2021