

Information for Patients

Receiving a Short Course of Radiotherapy to the Pelvis or Abdomen



This leaflet is for patients attending for radiotherapy treatment to their pelvis or tummy (abdomen). You will be having between 1 and 10 treatments.

This leaflet describes radiotherapy planning and treatment and also the effects you may experience during and after treatment. We also offer advice on how best to cope with any treatment side effects.

Your doctor has decided to give you this treatment to help with some of your symptoms. These symptoms will vary but they may include:

- **pain**
- **bleeding**
- **areas of swelling causing discomfort.**

The effects of treatment vary from one patient to another and the information given here is a general guide. Your doctor and radiographers will explain your treatment and any side effects that you may experience.

Preparation for Treatment

Before radiotherapy begins, we will plan your treatment. This is done by your radiographers and your doctor at the CT simulator.

When you attend for your radiotherapy planning and treatment, your radiographers will ask you to remove your trousers or skirt. This helps to make it easier to lie in the correct position and is more comfortable. They will ask you to slip your underwear down to uncover the area that is being treated. Your radiographers will ensure your dignity is maintained by covering you whenever possible.

CT Simulator

Your treatment is planned using a CT scanner. The radiographers will help you onto the couch in the position necessary for your treatment. The bed is quite hard but we will do our best to make you as comfortable as possible.



At the time of your scan, your radiographers will put marks on your skin on your pelvis or tummy with a felt tip pen. It is important that you stay as still as you can during the scan. It will only take a few minutes.

The x-ray images from this

CT scan will help us plan your radiotherapy. Your doctor and radiographer will look at your scan and decide on the exact area to be treated. This can take 20-30 minutes so if you have a family member or a friend with you they can come and sit with you. Once your doctor is satisfied with your planned treatment, your radiographers will replace the pen marks with a little permanent mark (tattoo) which looks like a tiny freckle. This planning appointment will take about 40 minutes.

Radiotherapy Treatment

It is likely that your treatment will start on the same day or a few days after your planning appointment. If you are on any medication please bring it with you as you may be in the department for a few hours.

The machine used to deliver your radiotherapy treatment is called a Linear Accelerator.



Each time you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT simulator. Your radiographers leave the room while the machine is on, but they will monitor you closely on closed circuit TV. There is nothing to feel during treatment or immediately afterwards. Your treatment usually takes around 10 minutes. It is important that you stay as still as you can during treatment and breathe normally.

Your radiotherapy will be given in small doses, Monday to Friday, but not at the weekend. The department is open from 8.10am – 6.30pm.

If you have any questions please ask.

Effects of Treatment

It is important to remember that this is a general guide. Everyone is different and the side effects from radiotherapy treatment will vary. Below is a list of possible side effects:

- **Tiredness:** During your treatment, you may feel more tired than usual. The tiredness can last for some time after treatment has finished.
- **Bladder:** The inside of the bladder may become a little irritated, like cystitis. You may need to pass urine more often than usual, and may have a burning sensation when passing urine. Drinking plenty of water will help.
- **Bowel:** You may notice a change in your bowel movements. You may need to move your bowels more frequently and the stools you pass may be softer. This may be accompanied by colicky or wind pains. You should drink plenty of fluids and try to avoid foods that are likely to make these symptoms worse.
- **Skin:** The skin in the treated area will be more sensitive and may become pink or red, dry and itchy. This can be treated with creams; however it is very important that you use only those given to you or recommended by Beatson staff.

- **Hair:** There will be a loss of hair only in the treated area. This is usually temporary, although in some patients it may not regrow.
- **Nausea:** If you are having treatment in the abdomen (tummy) area, you may feel sick after the treatment has finished or later in the evening. Your doctor will give you tablets to help if this is likely.

Skin Care during Treatment

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. Avoid putting anything overly hot or cold (hot water bottle or hot/cold packs) on the treated area.

General Advice following radiotherapy

The treatment may at first make your symptoms slightly worse. However any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down.

Try to get enough rest and sleep, especially when the treatment begins to make you feel tired. It is also important that you try to continue with some of your normal daily activities. A sensible balance between rest and activity may be most beneficial. Research has shown that gentle exercise is also beneficial for people who have had a cancer diagnosis both in the short and longer term. There are programmes available that can help with this. Please let us know if you are interested in finding out more.

Any side-effects you experience may last for a few weeks. It is important to let your GP know if you feel these symptoms are not settling.

What do I do if I feel unwell?

If you suddenly feel unwell and are unable to come for treatment, contact your GP and also let your treatment unit know. **It is important that you try to attend each appointment.** If you

manage to come for your radiotherapy but feel unwell let your radiographers know as soon as you arrive and they can arrange for a doctor to see you.

If you are unwell and have completed your treatment you must contact your own GP, Radiotherapy Advice Line or the Cancer Treatment Helpline (see Where can I Get Help section overleaf).

After Treatment Ends

Your doctor will arrange to see you at a follow-up appointment after your treatment is complete. We will send you the appointment details.

Where can I Get Help?

Information and 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 is available from:

- **Information and Support Radiographer**
Tel: 0141 301 7427
- **Information Radiographer and Counsellor**
Tel: 0141 301 7423

We have an Information Centre on Level 1 where you can find further information and signposting to other services.

Tel: 0141 301 7390

The Cancer Centre has a **Radiotherapy Advice Line** available for patients who have completed treatment and have a **non-urgent** query. This is an answer phone service, available from Monday – Friday. Please leave your name and contact number and we 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 and 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 deeply distressing time for you and those closest to you. Within the department we have a counselling and clinical psychology service that can help with worries and difficulties you might be having. If you think this may be helpful to you, please ask staff to put you in touch.

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

- **Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 0000**
www.macmillan.org.uk
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.
- **Maggie's Gartnavel: 0141 357 2269**
- **Maggie's Lanarkshire, Monklands Hospital: 01236 771199**
- **Maggie's Forth Valley: 01324 868069**
Maggie's Centre provides a comprehensive cancer support programme for people and their families affected by cancer.
- **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
- **Macmillan Benefits Team (within the Beatson)**
0141 301 7374
Provides free and confidential advice for people affected by cancer and their carers.
- **Beatson Cancer Centre** – if you want to find out more about our Centre please visit www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk
- **If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit: www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive**
- **NHS 24 111**

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