

Information for patients receiving radiotherapy or chemoradiation for oesophageal cancer.



This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy or combinations of radiotherapy and chemotherapy (chemoradiation) for a cancer arising within the oesophagus (gullet). It describes the radiotherapy planning and treatment. It also explains the effects that you may experience during and after treatment and how best to cope with them. We treat each patient as an individual and the effects of treatment may vary from one patient to another. Your doctor, radiographer, and clinical nurse specialist (CNS) will explain specific aspects of your treatment.

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of carefully measured doses of radiation to treat cancer. It damages the cells and stops them dividing and growing. Most patients having radiotherapy are treated using a high energy beam of x-rays delivered to a precise area, by a machine called a linear accelerator.

Your radiotherapy will be given in small daily doses, Monday to Friday but not at weekends.

Therapy radiographers operate the radiotherapy planning and treatment machines and will be able to answer any questions or concerns that you may have.

You will receive a list of appointments which will include planning and treatment dates and times.

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

Preparation for Treatment

Radiotherapy can be given in a number of different ways and there are several options your doctor may choose to plan your treatment. Your doctor and radiographers planning your treatment will explain this to you.

Planning your treatment

Before you begin your radiotherapy, the treatment must be carefully planned. This is done by taking a scan using a special

x-ray machine called a CT Simulator.

These scan images will be used to produce a unique treatment plan for your own individual needs. This is a complicated process and needs time to be produced; therefore you won't start your treatment until a few weeks after your scan.

It will be necessary for you to remove your clothes from the waist up for the scan and treatment. Your radiographers will keep you covered as much as possible.

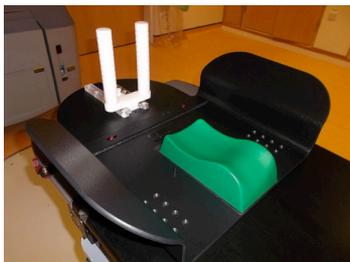
This scan may involve a small injection of contrast (dye) which will help us to see the area we want to treat more clearly. Your Doctor or radiographer will put a small needle (cannula) into a vein, usually in your arm. It will be taped in place and will stay in during the scan. We will inject the contrast through this needle. It may feel a little cold but you should not feel any discomfort.

There are two ways which we can position you for your planning and treatment. Your Doctor will decide which is best for you and your type of treatment.

Option 1

Your radiographers will help you to lie on the CT Simulator couch. Usually this will be lying on your back with your arms raised above your head, supported by a special headrest and arm support (see image below). If you have difficulty with this the radiographers will help you.

Once you are in the correct position, the radiographers will draw 3 crosses onto your skin with felt tip pens. These will be on the



front, left and right sides of your chest. The radiographers will move the couch into the correct position to start the scan. The radiographers will leave the room to carry out the scan. They will be watching you all the time through a window. It is important that you remain as still and relaxed as possible. You can breathe normally.

Once the scan is finished, the radiographers will need to make the pen marks on your skin permanent. They do this by giving you small tattoos, which look like tiny freckles on your skin. These tattoos will be used every day to make sure you are in the correct position for your treatment.

The whole process will last approximately 30 minutes.

Option 2

Before you go to the CT simulator, you will have to visit the Mould Room to have a 'beam directional shell' (BDS) or 'mask' made (see image below). The mask keeps your head and shoulders still during the treatment.



The process of making the mask will be explained to you in detail by the Mould Room team when you go for your appointment.

On your following appointment you will attend the CT Simulator. Your radiographers will help you to lie on the CT Simulator couch and they will fit your mask. Please let the radiographers know if you have any problems as they will help to make you more comfortable.

Once you are in the correct position, the radiographers will draw 3 marks onto your mask with felt tip pens. These will be on the front, left and right sides of your shell. The radiographers will leave the room now to begin your scan. It is very important that you remain as still and relaxed as you possibly can during your scan.

Sometimes your Doctor might decide that you only need a short course of treatment. You will be given a comfy headrest or pillow to lie on. Your treatment may start the same day or within a few days of you being scanned.

Treatment

Your treatment radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts, and check you know what to expect and how many treatments you will have. This can vary, but as a guide it is usually between 1 and 5 weeks of treatment. It is important that you attend every day for treatment. Please let the Radiographers know if you have any problems.

If you are feeling unwell please let us know when you arrive for treatment, rather than wait until you come into the treatment room. This allows us some time to try to sort out whatever is necessary while you are waiting.

Each day you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT scanner. The radiographers leave the room while the machine is on but they are monitoring you closely on closed circuit TV while your treatment is being delivered. You will not feel anything 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.

During your treatment, your radiographers will take images or a scan to make sure you are lying in exactly the right position. You will not get any results from these images or scans.

You will be reviewed by your CNS once a week while you are on

treatment, this is usually on a Monday, and will coincide with your treatment.

Chemotherapy and radiotherapy (chemoradiation)

Many people having radiotherapy for cancer in the oesophagus (gullet) will also be given drug treatment (chemotherapy) along with their radiotherapy. The chemotherapy increases the activity of the radiotherapy against the cancer cells and may be given in a number of ways. This usually means you will come into our ward at the beginning and end of your radiotherapy. Some people may have a couple of courses of chemotherapy before they start their radiotherapy.

Your doctor will discuss these aspects of treatment with you in detail. They may also discuss the possibility of taking part in a clinical trial looking at new ways of giving chemotherapy. This will be fully explained and you will receive separate, specific written information about any study being considered. If you are concerned about anything please ask.

General Advice During Treatment

- Although you may be feeling off your food, it's important to eat to maintain your strength. Facing three large meals a day can be very difficult if you feel this way. Try having smaller meals or snacks more often. It can also help to serve your food on smaller plates – it's less off-putting and you can feel pleased with yourself if you manage to finish it. Please let us know if you are having problems. You can obtain food supplements from your GP if you have completed treatment and are still having trouble eating properly.
- Keep drinking plenty of fluids, as it's important you don't become dehydrated. You might find thicker fluids such as milk and tomato juice easier to swallow than water.
- It also helps to avoid very hot drinks, rough foods, strong spices and alcohol until things settle down after treatment has ended.

- If your swallowing gets worse then your doctor may wish to look at other ways to help you to swallow more normally. So, if you notice any changes that make swallowing more difficult, especially swallowing liquids then you should tell your radiographers or CNS. If you have finished treatment, please tell your own doctor (GP) or call your nurse specialist at your local hospital or at the Beatson.
- 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 or see the 'Where to get help' section at the end of this leaflet.
- Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive so you can be around your friends and family as normal.

Skin Care During Treatment

- You may bath or shower during treatment, but don't have the water too hot (lukewarm).
- You may use your usual soap and pat your skin dry with a soft towel. If your skin becomes irritated we may advise you to stop.
- Avoid adding anything to the bath water, for example oils, dettol, savlon etc. as they may irritate your skin.
- You will find that you may be more comfortable if you wear loose fitting clothes, preferably with cotton next to your skin.

Early Effects of Radiotherapy Treatment

Each patient is individual and may experience the effects to differing degrees. However, most people find the side effects of the treatment become more noticeable as the treatment progresses. They may last for several weeks after it has ended.

Skin: The skin in the treated area will be more sensitive and may become pink or red. It may also feel a little dry or itchy. This tends to be a couple of weeks into treatment. This usually settles down after treatment ends. If it becomes a problem the radiographers can arrange to get you some cream. Please follow the advice above when bathing or showering until any skin reaction has settled down.

Tiredness: You will begin to feel quite tired during your treatment. It tends to start 2-3 weeks into your course of treatment and will last for a number of weeks afterwards.

Swallowing: You may develop some soreness when swallowing or feel as if there is a lump there. This usually happens if you are having treatment to the upper part of the gullet (oesophagus). If you are having treatment to the lower part of the gullet, it may feel more like heartburn or indigestion. Your doctor can prescribe medicine to help this. You must tell the radiographers, CNS or your doctor if you are not able to eat properly or if you notice a feeling of food sticking.

Heartburn and indigestion: This can develop a week or two into treatment and may happen particularly if you are having treatment to the lower part of the gullet (oesophagus). Avoid highly spiced, fatty and rough foods. Drink plenty of liquid (not too hot). If this becomes a problem your doctor can prescribe medicine to help.

Nausea: This may be a problem if the lower part of the gullet (oesophagus) is being treated and any chemotherapy you receive may also add to it. Nausea can usually be treated effectively by anti-sickness medication, which your doctor can prescribe for you.

Hair: There will be a loss of hair only in the treatment area. This is usually temporary, although in some patients it may not re-grow

Late Effects of Treatment

We believe the benefits of your treatment outweigh any longer-term risks involved. It is important to remember that

radiotherapy is given when your doctor has concerns of a risk of your cancer coming back.

Remember that as well as the side effects which can occur while you are receiving treatment, other possible longer-term side-effects can occur. It is important to emphasise the likelihood of these effects is small and varies from one person to another.

Your doctor will explain specific individual issues with you personally, therefore the following is a general guide.

- It is possible the area of the gullet that is treated may become narrowed after your treatment is finished. This may cause a change in your swallowing. If this happens it is important you tell your GP, your CNS or one of your hospital doctors. This narrowing can be the result of scarring produced by the treatment. This part of your gullet may need to be stretched. This is done at endoscopy (an examination of the inside of your oesophagus using a special camera) and it may need to be done more than once.
- Small numbers of patients notice a dry cough and some shortness of breath a few months after their treatment is complete. This is an effect of the radiotherapy on the lungs, which produces some temporary inflammation of the lung tissue. This usually lasts a short time and often does not need any specific treatment but it is important to report it to your doctor. Occasionally you may need a short course of steroid tablets. Very occasionally the breathlessness may last longer and may not fully settle with time. This happens when the radiotherapy produces some scarring within the lung tissue.
- A very rare, but potential effect is that radiation can cause tumours. Although this is a serious possible consequence of your treatment, it is important to bear in mind that it is extremely rare. If it does happen it is likely to be many years after the treatment has been completed.

After Treatment Ends

As we have said above, most symptoms that develop because of treatment will gradually settle down. The tiredness can take a good few weeks to leave you. It is 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.

Your doctor will arrange to see you about 6-8 weeks after your 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 with their own Upper GI 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 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 in the Beatson is available from:

- Clinical Nurse Specialist in Upper Gastro-Intestinal Cancer
Tel: 0141 301 7587
- Information and Support Radiographer Tel: 0141 301 7427
- Information Radiographer & Counsellor Tel: 0141 301 7423

The Beatson Cancer Centre has a Radiotherapy Advice Line available for patients who have completed treatment. It is an answer phone service manned from Monday to Friday only. Please leave your name and telephone number with a short message. You will be phoned 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

We also have an Information Centre on Level 1 where you can find further information and signposting to other services.
Tel: 0141 301 7390.

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.
- **Maggies Gartnavel – 0141 357 2269**
- **Maggies Lanarkshire (Monklands Hospital) – 01236 771199**
- **Maggie’s Forth Valley: 01324 868069**

Open Monday to Friday offering professional support to anyone affected by cancer Maggie’s Centre provides a comprehensive cancer support programme for people and their families affected by cancer.

- **Cancer Support Scotland (Tak Tent)** based in The Calman Centre, Gartnavel campus. 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.
- **Smokeline 0800 848484** Provides support and guidance to help you stop smoking.
- **ochre (oesophageal cancer has reached everywhere)** ochre was formed to promote awareness of oesophageal cancer amongst the public, professionals, politicians and patients. Tel 0800 822 3370 www.ochrecharity.org.uk
- **Oesophageal Patients Association: 0121 704 9860**, Website www.opa.org.uk offers leaflets providing guidance during and after treatment as well as telephone support and information from former patients.
- **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**
- **NHS 24 111**