



Information for Patients

Receiving Radiotherapy to the Pancreas



This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy treatment for pancreatic cancer. It describes:

- What is radiotherapy?
- How your radiotherapy is planned and treated.
- 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 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. The rays are used to treat the tumour and a small surrounding area.

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.

Before agreeing to this treatment it is also important that you understand its nature and possible effects. If you are in doubt about anything or have any questions or problems, please let us know as soon as possible.

Planning and Treatment Preparation

It may be necessary to follow some instructions before your planning scan and treatment. You may have to fast (not eat) for 2 hours, drink water or a flavoured water before your appointment(s). Your doctor or radiographer will discuss this with you.

Your CT scan appointment

Before your course of radiotherapy can begin, the treatment must be carefully planned. You will visit the CT simulator. This is very similar to a normal CT scanner and is specially designed for planning your radiotherapy treatment. This is not a diagnostic scan and you will not get any results from it.



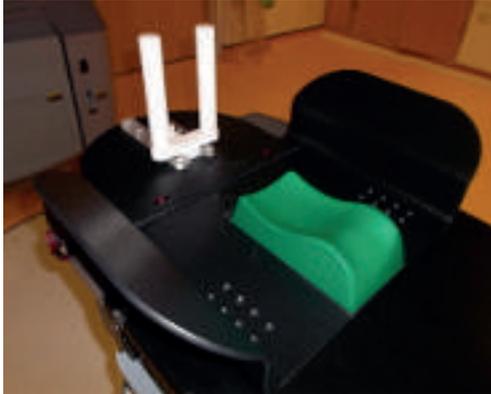
CT Simulator

These images will be used to produce a unique treatment plan for you. This is a complicated process and takes time; therefore you may not start your treatment until a few weeks after your scan.

For your scan you may need to drink an aineseed flavoured drink called gastrografin. It allows areas of the body such as the bowel, oesophagus (gullet) and stomach to be seen more clearly on the scan. This helps your Doctor to produce a plan for your radiotherapy treatment, ensuring that all of the area needing treatment is included while avoiding other organs as much as possible. Your radiographers will let you know if you need to drink the gastrografin before the scan.

Your radiographer will explain the scanning procedure to you. They will ask you to undress from the waist up. Your radiographers will ensure your dignity is maintained by covering you up whenever possible.

You will be shown into the scanning room and asked to lie on the CT simulator table. It is flat and very hard, but you won't have to lie on it for very long. Usually you will be lying on your back with your arms raised above your head, supported by a special headrest and arm supports (see picture below). If you have difficulty with this your radiographers will help you. It is important you stay as still as you can, but you should try to relax as much as possible and breathe normally.



Your radiographers will place 3 pen marks on your skin along with 3 sticky markers which show up on your scan. Once satisfied that everything is in the correct position, your radiographers will leave the room and start the scan. They are watching you at all times through a window. The scan only takes a few minutes.

Once the scan is finished, your 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.

Contrast injection

For this scan you may need to have an injection of contrast (dye) that 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 on the back of your hand or arm. The needle will be removed and will leave a small tube of plastic in your vein. It will be taped in place and will stay in during the CT scan. We will then inject the dye through this plastic. It may feel a little cold but you should not feel any discomfort.

Some people can have an allergic reaction to the contrast. This is rare but we will ask some questions before beginning to ensure it is unlikely to happen to you. Your radiographers will keep a close check on you during the injection and scan, so if you feel anything unusual please tell us.

Treatment

The treatment will be given on a machine called a linear accelerator which is a special x-ray machine used to give radiotherapy treatment. Your radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts.



Linear Accelerator

As a guide, treatment can often last between 1 and 5 weeks. Your radiotherapy will be given in small daily doses, usually Monday to Friday but not at the weekend. It is important that you attend every day for treatment. Please let your radiographers know if you have any problems.

Your doctor or radiographer will have explained if you need to follow any preparation instructions before each of your treatments. Your radiographers will go over this with you every day. If you have been asked to fast, you will need to do this before you come in for your treatment.

Each day you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT scanner. Your radiographers leave the room while the machine is on but they are monitoring 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.

General advice during treatment

There is no reason to change your lifestyle during treatment but it may help to:

- 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.

Early effects of radiotherapy

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

- **Nausea (sickness):** It is likely that you may feel sick or squeamish. This often happens 2-6 hours following treatment and usually settles within a couple of hours. Your doctor may give you anti-sickness tablets to help with this.
- **Bowel:** The treatment might irritate your bowel causing cramp like pain in your abdomen, bloating, opening your bowels more often and passing watery bowel motions (diarrhoea).
- **Tiredness:** You may begin to feel quite tired during treatment. This tends to start 2-3 weeks into your course of treatment and may last for several weeks afterwards.
- **Skin:** Some patients notice a slight reddening of the skin in the area that is being treated. This should start to settle down within a few days of finishing treatment.

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.

What do I do if I feel ill?

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

Similarly if you are unwell and have completed your treatment you must contact your own family doctor (GP).

After Treatment Ends

Remember any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down. 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 6 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?

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 is available from:

- **Upper GI specialist nurse:** Tel **0141 301 7587** and page **15141**.
- **Macmillan Information Radiographer and 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**

There is also 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. Please call as soon as an issue arises.

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:** Tel: **0808 808 0000**
www.macmillan.org.uk
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.
- **Maggies Glasgow** (Gartnavel complex): Tel: **0141 357 2269**
- **Maggies Lanarkshire** (Monklands Hospital): Tel: **01236 771199**
- **Maggie's Forth Valley:** Tel: **01324 868069**
www.maggiecentres.org
Open Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, 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-** (based at The Calman Centre, within the grounds of the Gartnavel Complex).
Freephone **0800 652 4531** or **0141 337 8199**
www.cancersupportscotland.org
Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups. Complementary therapies available. Open Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

- **Beatson Cancer Charity** Tel: **0141 301 7667**
Provides support for patients and families within the Beatson Cancer Centre. Services available for in-patients. Open every day, 9am -9pm.
- **Pancreatic Cancer Scotland**- promotes awareness of pancreatic cancer in Scotland. Support groups offering practical and emotional guidance to patients and families.
<https://www.pancanscot.org/pancreatic-cancer/>
- **Pancreatic Cancer UK**-Support line available Mon- Fri 10am- 4pm Tel: **0808 801 0707**.
Provides information about pancreatic cancer and offers a range of support services.
<https://www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/>
- If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit:
www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive
- **The Beatson West of Scotland website** – to find out more about our Centre please visit:
www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk
- NHS 24 - **111**



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