

Information for Patients

Receiving a Short Course of Radiotherapy



This leaflet is for patients receiving a short course of radiotherapy. It describes:

- What radiotherapy is.
- Your radiotherapy planning and treatment.
- The effects that you may experience during and after treatment, and how best to cope with them.

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of carefully measured doses of radiation to treat cancer.

Your doctor has decided to give you this treatment to help alleviate some of your symptoms. These symptoms will vary depending on the area needing treatment, but they may include:

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Areas of swelling causing discomfort.

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.

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. You will be attending for 1-5 treatments.

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

Preparation for Treatment

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



Picture 1: CT scanner

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 and radiographers will plan your radiotherapy treatment. This may take 20-30 minutes. During this time you do not need to stay still as your radiographers will place you back into the same position. If you have a family member or a friend with you they can come and sit with you.

Once your doctor has planned your treatment, your radiographers will mark your skin in the area to be treated, with a tiny permanent mark (tattoo).

This planning appointment will take about 50 minutes.

Radiotherapy Treatment

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.

Your radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts.

Picture 2: 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 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.

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. Your doctor and radiographers will be able to give you more specific information when you come for treatment. Some common questions that patients ask are detailed below:

Can I have a bath or a shower?

Radiotherapy only affects the area of the body that we are treating. Wash 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).

Will I feel any different after treatment?

During treatment you will not feel or see anything. However once your treatment has finished you may feel more tired than usual. The tiredness can last for some time after your treatment has finished.

Will I lose my hair?

You may lose hair in the treated area, but it will usually re-grow a few months after treatment has ended.

Will I feel sick?

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.

Will I have diarrhoea?

If you are having treatment to your lower back, hip or pelvis, you may experience some diarrhoea. Your doctor can give you something for this.

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. They can arrange for someone to see you.

The treatment may at first make your symptoms slightly worse. However any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down. If you feel they aren't improving 2-4 weeks after finishing your treatment, please contact your GP.

If you are unwell and have completed your treatment, you must contact your own GP. Please also see below for urgent symptoms, where contacting the Cancer Treatment Helpline may be more appropriate.

After Treatment Ends

Your doctor will arrange to see you at a follow-up appointment after your treatment is completed. 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 is available from:

- 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**

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 77 11 99
- **Maggie's Forth Valley:** 01324 86 80 69

Maggie's Centre provides a comprehensive cancer support programme for people and their families affected by cancer.

- **Cancer Support Scotland –The Calman Centre, Gartnavel Complex.** Freephone: 0800 652 4531.

Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups. Complementary therapies available. www.cancersupportscotland.org

- **Beatson Cancer Charity:** 0141 301 7667

Provides support for patients and families within the Beatson Cancer Centre. Services available for in-patients. Open every day, 9am–9pm.

- **Macmillan Benefits Team (within the Beatson):**
0141 301 7374

Provides free and confidential advice for people affected by cancer and their carers.

- If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit: www.nhs.uk/getactive
- **The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre** – if you want to find out more about our Centre please visit www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk
- **NHS 24** 111

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