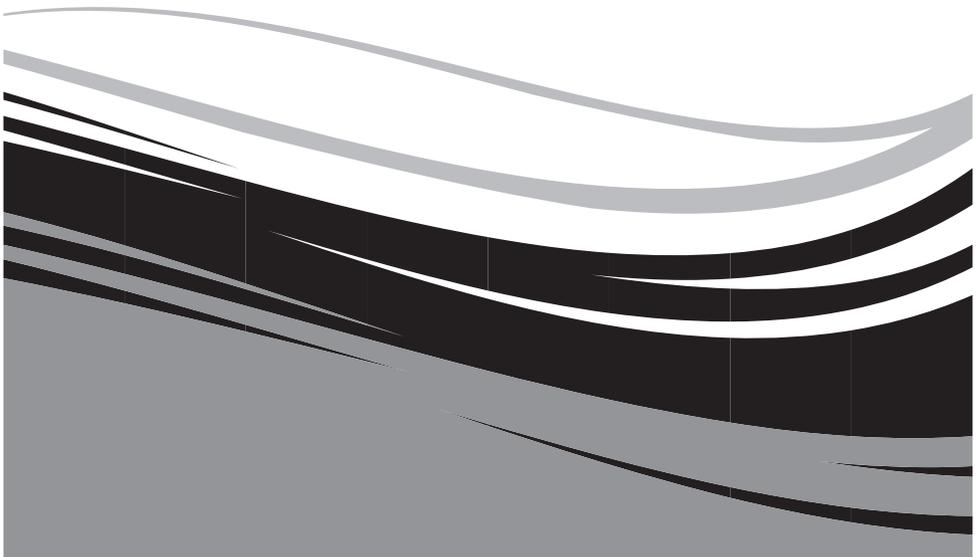


# Information for patients receiving radiotherapy for penile cancer



**This leaflet is for patients attending The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre. It describes:**

- The radiotherapy planning and treatment.
- The effects that you may experience during and after treatment, and how best to cope with them.
- Who to contact if you have any questions or concerns.

Your doctor, radiographer and clinical nurse specialist will explain specific aspects of your treatment.

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

## **What is Radiotherapy?**

Radiotherapy uses 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 x-rays are used to treat the tumour and surrounding area. This is likely to include any scars and nearby skin.

Radiotherapy is given in multiple small doses over a specified period of days or weeks.

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 your planning and treatment dates and times.

## Preparation for Treatment

**These instructions do not apply to all patients. Your doctor, clinical nurse specialist or radiographer will explain if they apply to you.**

Before each radiotherapy appointment, your radiographers **may** ask you to fill your bladder. This helps with the accuracy of your treatment. It can also help to reduce some of the side effects you may experience.

When you arrive in the department, they will ask you to empty your bladder and then drink **500ml of water**. This helps to ensure you have a comfortably full bladder. It is important that you drink the water within 5 minutes. You will then **wait 30 minutes** before having your scan or treatment.

As it is important that these instructions are followed, please remember the following:

- You will need to be well hydrated before coming to these appointments.
- You will need to be in the department at least 30 minutes before your treatment appointment times.
- If you are coming to the department by hospital transport please allow extra time for your preparation.
- When you arrive in the department, your radiographers will tell you when to start drinking. Please do not do this until you are asked to.
- Once you drink the water you should not empty your bladder until after you have had your scan or treatment.

## Planning Appointment - CT Simulator

Before you can begin your radiotherapy, the treatment must be carefully planned. This will be at the **CT Simulator** (a machine similar to a CT scanner).



**CT Simulator**

Your radiographers will show you into a changing room and ask you to undress from the waist down. You can keep your underwear on and your radiographers will slip them down when needed.

Your radiographers will take you into the scanning room and ask you to lie on your back. They will slip your underwear down and cover you whenever possible. They will put some temporary marks on your skin with a felt tip pen. Some small markers will be placed on top of these marks. These markers show up on your scan and will be removed when the planning is complete.

Your radiographers will move the couch into the starting position and leave the room. They will monitor you at all times. Once the scan is complete, the temporary marks will be replaced by permanent marks called tattoos. These marks are tiny, no larger than a pin head. Your radiographers will use them to help position you for your treatment every day.

## **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 radiographer will put a small needle (cannula) into a vein, usually on the back of your hand or arm. They will remove the needle leaving 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 contrast (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.

The dye is only needed for the planning scan; you will not need to get it for your daily treatment.

## **Additional Information**

Sometimes your doctor may wish to place a piece of soft wax over the treatment area. This will be decided at your CT appointment. Your doctor or radiographer will explain this to you.

## **Treatment**

Your radiographers will explain the procedure before treatment starts. Your radiotherapy will be given in small daily doses, Monday to Friday, but not at the weekend.

You will have your treatment on a machine called a linear accelerator as shown below.



**Linear Accelerator**

When you start treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT simulator. The lights in the room will dim for a few minutes while they position you. Your radiographers have to leave the room while the machine is on but they will monitor you on closed circuit TV. The treatment machine moves round about you but doesn't touch you. Each treatment lasts 10-20 minutes. It is painless and you will feel no different immediately afterwards.

Please ask your radiographers if you have any questions or problems.

## **Early Effects of Treatment**

During radiotherapy the area being treated will gradually respond in a way similar to an 'inflammation' or 'sunburn'. This may last for 6-8 weeks after your treatment has finished.

All patients are different and the following is a general guide to some of the effects you may experience. The radiotherapy only affects the area being treated.

**Skin** - The skin in the treated area will be more sensitive. Your skin may become moist and tender and may become raw. You will be seen regularly throughout treatment and given appropriate creams or gel plus painkillers to manage this.

**Passing Urine** - You may experience discomfort passing urine. This may include a feeling of urgency and going more frequently. Drinking plenty of water (at least 4 pints per day) and reducing your intake of caffeine and alcohol can help.

**Bowel** - Possibly after 2 - 3 weeks of treatment you may develop a slight looseness of your bowel (diarrhoea). This may be accompanied by colicky or wind pains. If this happens, please tell your radiographers, who you will see daily, or the clinical nurse specialist who will see you for your weekly review. If you develop diarrhoea, avoiding spicy, fatty or processed foods might help. It is also best to cut down on large amounts of fruit juice and fruit and vegetables if you start to have diarrhoea.

**Pain** - You may experience some pain and discomfort in the treated area. This may happen 2-3 weeks into treatment, but can also occur in the few weeks after treatment ends. Please let your specialist nurse or radiographers know, and we can give you something to help with this. Your clinical nurse specialist will keep in touch with you once you have finished treatment and will ask how your pain is.

**Tiredness**- You may feel tired during your treatment and possibly for several weeks after treatment is complete.

## **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.

The penile nurse specialist will see you once a week at the review clinic while you are having treatment. They will help you with any problems you may experience during treatment.

## **Skin Care during Treatment**

Radiotherapy only affects the skin in the area being treated.

- You may bath or shower during treatment, provided the water is not too hot. Pat the skin in the treated area dry with a soft towel.
- You may find that you are more comfortable if you wear loose fitting clothes, particularly with cotton next to your skin.
- If your skin becomes itchy, please avoid scratching it, and try to use a moisturising cream. We can recommend which creams are best to use.
- If your skin gets red, broken or sore, please let your specialist nurse or radiographers know. They will advise how best to care for your skin. Letting air into the area may provide some relief.

## **Late Effects of Treatment**

We believe that the benefit of your radiotherapy treatment far outweighs any risks involved. However, there are potential long-term effects that may affect a small number of people. It is important to point out that effects can vary from person to person.

The following may apply to you:

- Change in pigmentation (skin colouring) – the treated skin may become darker or lighter following radiotherapy treatment and may feel different (thicker or thinner).
- Sexual activity – Following your treatment there is a possibility of loss of sexual function. This may occur as a result of radiotherapy, surgery, or a combined effect of both. If you develop problems, you can be referred to a specialist who may be able to offer help and advice. Please let your doctor or specialist nurse know if this becomes a problem, even if we do not ask specifically.

For your own comfort, you may wish to avoid having sexual intercourse until any inflammation has settled. Please feel free to discuss with your clinical nurse specialist or doctor about queries relating to your sexual activity after radiotherapy.

- Urine flow – After radiotherapy there is a small risk of narrowing of the tube that takes urine from the bladder. If this develops, the flow of urine will be reduced and there may be ‘spraying’. A small operation may be needed to correct it. If urinating becomes very difficult and you feel unable to empty your bladder fully, please contact your healthcare professionals immediately.
- Lymphoedema – You may have had surgery or radiotherapy to your pelvic lymph nodes. This can cause fluid to build up and your legs may become swollen. This is known as lymphoedema. If you are concerned that you might have lymphoedema, please speak to your doctor or clinical nurse specialist. It is important to let us know about this as we need to give you advice on how to look after your legs.

## **After treatment ends**

Your skin reaction may persist for a few weeks after your treatment has finished. We may need to see you regularly in the clinic for a few weeks if there are raw areas. Your nurse specialist will contact your GP surgery/district nurses to give them information on how to care for your skin.

If you have any concerns about side effects from your radiotherapy, you can contact your clinical nurse specialist (see below).

Your radiotherapy doctor will arrange to see you about 1-4 weeks after treatment ends.

## Where Can I get Help?

All the 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:-

Penile Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist:

**0141 301 7569 or 07971079102**

Information and Support Radiographer: **0141 301 7427**

Information Radiographer and Counsellor: **0141 301 7423**

**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. It is an answer phone service which is checked at regular intervals. Please leave your name, telephone number and brief description of your concern. 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 increased 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**

If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit: [www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive)

## **Counselling and Psychology Service**

This leaflet deals with the physical aspects of your treatment, but your emotional wellbeing 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. 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. 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](http://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.  
[www.maggies.org](http://www.maggies.org)

- **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](http://www.cancersupportscotland.org)
- **ORCHID – fighting male cancer. National Helpline Tel: 0808 802 0010**  
[www.orchid-cancer.org.uk](http://www.orchid-cancer.org.uk)
- **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**

You may find some useful information on the websites listed above. However, it is important to note that The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre cannot accept responsibility for the quality and content of any information provided by other organisations.

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