

Patient information for patients receiving

# **A Short Course of Radiotherapy for Mesothelioma in the Chest**



This leaflet is for patients with mesothelioma who will have a short course of radiotherapy to surgical scars, drain sites or for chest pain. It describes:

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

Your doctor and radiographer will explain your treatment.

If you have any questions or problems please let us know as soon as possible.

## **Treatment Planning - CT Simulator**

Before radiotherapy begins your treatment must be carefully planned. You will have a scan at the CT simulator (a machine similar to a CT scanner). The images from this scan allow your Doctor and radiographers to plan your treatment. There are no results from this scan.

Before your scan, your doctor may wish to put a small piece of wire around your scar or where you feel pain. This helps when planning your treatment.

Your radiographers will check some details with you and explain the procedure. They will ask you to undress to the waist and give you a gown to wear. You will be shown into the scanning room and helped to lie on the CT couch. This is usually lying on your back. The couch can be a little uncomfortable. If you find lying flat particularly difficult, it may be a good idea to take painkillers just before your appointment.

**Picture 1: CT Simulator**



Your radiographers will have to remove your gown. They will keep you covered wherever possible. Once you are in the correct position, your radiographers will place temporary pen marks and stickers on the skin on your chest. They will then leave the room to start the scan. They are watching you at all times. The scan will only take 2-3 minutes. It is very important that you stay as still as you can during this time. Try to relax and breathe normally.

Once the scan is finished, your radiographers will replace the pen marks with little permanent marks (tattoos). They look like small freckles. These marks are used by your radiographers each day to ensure you are in the correct position for treatment.

You will have treatment within a few days of your CT simulator appointment.

## **Treatment**

You will have treatment on a Linear Accelerator. This is a special type of X-ray machine, used to deliver radiotherapy.

## Picture 2: Linear accelerator



Your radiographers will explain everything to you before treatment starts. They will position you just as you were when your treatment was planned at the CT simulator. Your radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on but they will be watching at all times via closed circuit TV. The machine may be moved to more than one position to deliver your treatment. It may seem close but it won't touch you.

The treatment is painless and usually takes around 5 -10 minutes. Your treatment may be given in one, two, five or six days depending on the reason for radiotherapy.

You will feel no different immediately afterwards.

## Effects of Treatment (early)

The effects of treatment vary from one person to another; therefore, the information given here is intended as a general guide. It does not mean that you will have all the effects described.

If you experience any of these side effects, please let your radiographers know.

- **Tiredness:** You will feel tired, especially in the first few days after your treatment. The tiredness may last for several weeks after treatment finishes.

- **Skin:** Your skin may become pink and itchy soon after the treatment. Wash with lukewarm water and your normal soap. We can recommend cream to use if your skin becomes irritated. The radiotherapy can also cause hair loss in the treated area.
- **Sore Throat:** If the area you had treated covers part of your throat, you may develop a sore throat or a feeling of a lump in your throat when you swallow. You can take pain killers for the pain. Your doctor can give you some medicine to help ease the 'lump' in your throat. These symptoms should settle down within a few weeks.
- **Heartburn:** If the area you had treated covers part of your gullet, you may experience heartburn or pain when you swallow. This can sometimes be quite uncomfortable and may last several days. Your doctor can give you something for this.
- **Pain:** You may have some pain in your chest during the first 48 hours after your treatment. This should settle quite quickly. You can take painkillers for this and contact your GP or NHS 24 if the pain persists.

## 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 radiation from radiotherapy does not stay in your body so it is safe to be near other people, including children and people who are pregnant.
- Try to drink plenty of fluids throughout your treatment to avoid becoming dehydrated.

## **What do I do if I feel ill?**

If you suddenly feel unwell and not able to come for treatment, let your treatment room know and contact your GP. If you feel able to come in to the department, let your radiographers know you are unwell as soon as you arrive and they can arrange for you to be seen.

## **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:

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

If you have any questions about your radiotherapy treatment or would like to talk to someone please contact us. We can arrange to meet with you during your treatment.

- **Information & Support Radiographer & Counsellor**  
Tel: 0141 301 7423
- **Macmillan Mesothelioma and Lung Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist** Tel: 0141 451 6157

**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 all radiotherapy patients. 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 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**

## **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](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)  
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.
- **Mesothelioma UK**  
Freephone number 0800 169 2409  
[www.mesothelioma.uk.com](http://www.mesothelioma.uk.com)
- **Action on Asbestos** Freephone 0800 089 1717  
[www.clydesideactiononasbestos.org.uk](http://www.clydesideactiononasbestos.org.uk)  
Providing advice and assistance to people and families affected by asbestos related disease.
- **Roy Castle Lung Foundation** Tel: 0333 323 7200  
[www.roycastlele.org](http://www.roycastlele.org)  
Providing information and support for those affected by lung cancer.
- **British Lung Foundation:** Helpline 03000 030 555  
<https://www.blf.org.uk/>  
Provides information and publications.
- **Maggie's Gartnavel:** 0141 357 2269
- **Maggie's Lanarkshire, Monklands Hospital:**  
01236 771 199
- **Maggie's Forth Valley:** 01324 868 069  
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 and Counselling available.

[www.cancersupportscotland.org](http://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.

- If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit:

[www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive)

- **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**

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