

Patient Information

# For Radiotherapy Treatment of Superficial Lesions



This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy treatment for superficial lesions (lesions on the skin or close to the skin surface).

It describes:

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

Your doctor, specialist nurse and radiographers will be able to explain your treatment in detail.

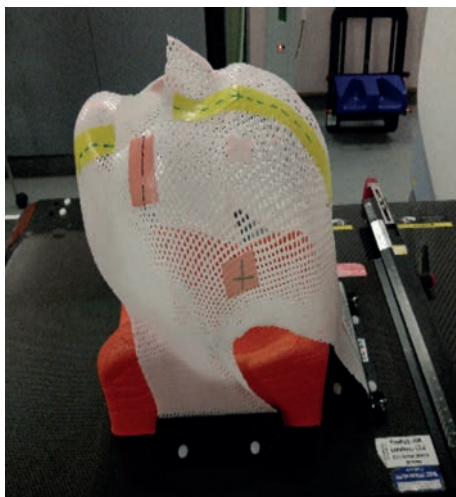
If you need more information or have any questions or problems, please let us know as soon as possible.

## Preparation for Treatment

If you are having an area of your head, face or neck treated, it may be necessary to make a 'lead mask' or 'beam directional shell' (BDS).



**Image 1: Mask**



**Image 2: Shell**

## Mould Room

The mask or shell is made for you in the mould room. The process will be explained to you in detail by the mould room team when you go for your appointment. It is painless.

You may find it easier to wear a vest, as you may need to take off your outer clothing down to your waist.

It is important that your skin is smooth before we start to make your shell. Therefore, if you have a beard, we may advise you to trim or shave it off before coming to the mould room.

There are small pieces of equipment that can be used to protect areas we don't want to treat. If they are required, your Doctor, specialist nurse or mould room staff will explain this to you.

## Treatment Planning

Your treatment needs to be carefully planned. Your doctor and a radiographer will examine you in a mark-up room. They will then use a pen to draw an outline on your skin or shell, around the area to be treated. It may be necessary to put some clear stickers over these pen marks so that they can be used when you start your treatment. A photograph of the area may be taken as a record.

Your treatment may start the same day as the mark-up appointment or within a day or two of this.

Your doctor **may** wish you to have a CT scan to help with planning your treatment. They will discuss this with you. This scan will be done in The Beatson.

## Treatment

The length of your treatment course will depend on the type of lesion you are having treated. This can vary from one treatment to 33 treatments.

Your treatment can be given on one of two machines, both options are detailed below. Both machines use low energy X-rays to treat the area.

The staff who operate these machines are called therapy radiographers. They are specially trained professionals responsible for planning and delivering your treatment accurately. They will explain everything before treatment starts.

When you arrive for your treatment, you should 'check in' at the hospital reception before taking a seat in your treatment room waiting area.

Each day you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the mark-up room at your planning appointment. You will be asked to remove any clothing that covers the area requiring treatment. If you had a mask or shell made, you will wear this for each treatment appointment.

Your radiographers will adjust the bed and machine to the correct position for your treatment. An applicator is fitted to the machine. It may rest gently on your skin. Your radiographers will make you as comfortable as possible.

Your radiographers will leave the room while the machine is on. The whole procedure does not take long. Your radiographers will monitor you closely on closed circuit TV. It is important that you stay as still as you can during your treatment and breathe normally. The machine will come close or may touch you, but you will not feel or see anything during treatment. The treatment is painless and you will feel no differently afterwards.

Please speak to your radiographers if you have any questions or problems.

### **Option 1: Superficial Unit**

You may have your treatment on the Superficial unit. This may also be referred to as the Xstrahl unit (Image 3).



**Image 3**

A thin lead shield may be used to protect the healthy tissue round the area being treated. This is placed on the skin before each treatment and will be removed after it.

If your treatment is near your eye you may need to wear a protective eye shield which is placed in the eye before each treatment and removed after. If this is needed for your treatment, you will be given a separate information sheet about this. We advise you not to drive to and from your appointments if you require the eye shield.

## **Option 2: Electron Treatment**

You may have your treatment on a Linear Accelerator (Linac).



**Image 4: Linear Accelerator**

A small sheet of wax may be placed on the area being treated. This is placed on the skin before each treatment and will be removed after it.

If your treatment is near your eye you may need to wear a protective eye shield which is placed in the eye before each treatment and removed after. If this is needed for your treatment, you will be given a separate information sheet about this. We advise you not to drive to and from your appointments if you require the eye shield.

## 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.
- Please speak to your radiographers, specialist nurse or doctor if you have any problems.

## Early effects of radiotherapy

Everyone is different and the side effects from radiotherapy treatment will vary. Therefore, the following is a general guide to some of the effects you may experience.

- **Skin:** During radiotherapy, the area being treated will gradually respond in a way similar to an 'inflammation'. The skin in the treated area will be more sensitive and may become pink or red.

If you are having a skin lesion treated, a scab may form or the area may bleed and may also become itchy. This tends to be a couple of weeks into treatment. If you require dressings on this area, the nursing staff here will do these for you. They will also be happy to keep in touch with your district nurse and advise them where necessary about your radiotherapy and any change which may be required to your dressings.

- **Eye:** If you are having treatment near your eye, you may have some irritation to your eye. We can give you something to help with this.

- **Tiredness:** You may begin to feel tired during treatment. This tends to start 2-3 weeks into your treatment and may last for several weeks afterwards.
- **Hair:** There will be a loss of hair only in the treated area. This is usually temporary, although in some patients it may not re-grow.
- **Pain:** If you have pain in the area to be treated, this may get slightly worse during treatment. This tends to start 2-3 weeks into your course of treatment and may last for several weeks afterwards.

During your treatment a specialist nurse or doctor may see you each week. They will assess and treat any side effects, give advice and answer any questions you may have.

## Skin Care during Treatment

Radiotherapy **only affects** the skin that is within the area being treated and instructions apply **only** to that area.

- You may bath or shower, provided the water is not too hot (lukewarm). Pat your skin dry with a soft towel. Please try not to rub off any marks put on your skin by your doctor or radiographer. If they fade, your radiographers will renew them.
- If your skin becomes irritated, you can use zerobase or a similar cream. The skin irritation could last 4-6 weeks. If your skin breaks, stop using the cream and seek advice.
- If the area being treated is under clothes, you will find that you may be more comfortable if you wear loose fitting clothes, to avoid rubbing, preferably with cotton next to your skin.
- If treatment is within the scalp area, wash hair with a mild shampoo and allow the hair to dry naturally. If you want to use a hair dryer, use a cool setting. Avoid using tongs or hair straighteners.

- If your face is being treated avoid shaving this area.
- If your face is being treated avoid wearing cosmetics.
- If the weather is hot and sunny, avoid exposure to bright sunlight. For example, sit in the shade, wear sunglasses or a wide brimmed hat.

## **After Treatment Ends**

When your treatment has finished, any side effects that may have developed can get slightly worse over the following few weeks. They will gradually settle. You may begin washing normally once your skin no longer looks red or feels itchy. Your doctor who referred you for radiotherapy will arrange to see you after your treatment has finished. This will be at the hospital where you first met them.

## **Possible later effects of treatment**

We believe that the benefit of your radiotherapy treatment outweighs any longer-term risks involved. However, you should be aware of these potential long-term effects, which may affect a small number of people. It is important to point out again that effects can vary from person to person and your doctor will explain specific individual issues to you personally. These can occur months or even years after treatment.

The following effects are a general guide:

- You will always be sensitive to the effects of the sun; especially during the first year after your treatment (only in the area you had treated). Protect yourself with sunglasses, a hat and wear a high factor sunscreen with both UVA/UVB protection and minimum SPF 50.
- Long-term risk of damage to the skin in the area treated.
- Skin pigmentation (lighter or darker in the area treated).
- Permanent loss of hair in area treated.
- Ulcers (these are very rare).

- A very rare but potential effect is that radiation can cause tumours. Although this is a serious possible risk of your radiotherapy, it is important to bear in mind that the effect is very rare. If it does happen it is likely to be many years after treatment.

## 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 Radiographer and Counsellor**

Tel: 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. Tel: 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 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.
- **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 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**

**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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