

Patient Information For Radiotherapy Treatment of Skin Lesions (VMAT)



This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy treatment for skin lesions. 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.

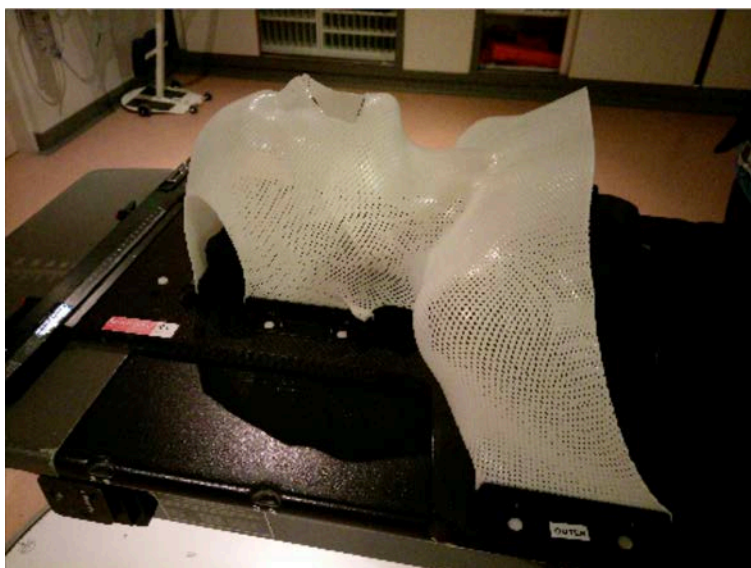
If you need more information or have any questions or problems, please let us know as soon as possible.

Preparation for Treatment: Mould Room

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

The shell is made for you in the mould room. They will explain how the shell is made when you attend for your appointment. It is completely painless.

Picture 1: Shell



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

If you are having an area of your head, neck or face treated, it is best to wear a collar-less top.

It is important that your skin is smooth before we start to make your shell. Therefore, if you have a beard you are advised to trim or shave it off before coming to the mould room. Please remember this is only if you are having your head, neck or face treated.

If necessary for your treatment, you may also be asked to use a 'mouth bite' which holds your jaw steady and helps protect your mouth from some of the effects of radiation.

Treatment planning

Before you begin your radiotherapy, the treatment must be carefully planned. This is done by taking a scan using a special X-ray machine called a CT Simulator. These scan images will be used to produce a unique treatment plan for you.

Picture 2: CT Simulator



Depending on the area being treated, it may be necessary for you to remove some items of clothing for the scan and treatment. Your radiographers will keep you covered as much as possible.

Your radiographers will help to position you on the CT couch. The position you will lie in will depend on the area being treated. Your radiographers will help to make you as comfortable as possible. Please let them know if you are uncomfortable, as you will need to lie in this position each day you come for treatment.

Your radiographers will put some pen marks on your skin or shell. They will also put some small markers on top of these marks. They will show up on your scan and help your doctor to plan your treatment.

Your radiographers will then move the couch into the correct position. They will leave the room to carry out the scan. They will be watching you all the time through a window. It is important that you remain as still and relaxed as possible. You can breathe normally.

Once the scan is finished, your radiographers will need to make any 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. If you have a shell, these marks will be on your shell and not on your skin.

The whole process will last approximately 30 minutes.

Treatment

Your treatment radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts. Your treatment will be daily, Monday- Friday. The length of your treatment course will depend on the type of skin lesion you are having treated. This can vary from one treatment to 35 treatments.

Radiotherapy is the use of carefully measured doses of radiation. 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. Your treatment is given using a machine called a linear accelerator.

Picture 3: Linear accelerator



Each day you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT scanner. If you had a shell made, you will wear it each day for treatment. Your radiographers leave the room while the machine is on but they are monitoring you at all times on closed circuit TV. The treatment machine will move round about you, but it will not touch you. You will not feel anything during treatment or immediately afterwards. Your treatment usually takes around 10-15 minutes. It is important that you stay as still as you can during treatment and breathe normally.

During your treatment, your radiographers will take images to make sure you are lying in exactly the right position. You will not get any results from these images.

You will be reviewed by your doctor or specialist nurse once a week while you are on treatment. If you have any problems or questions during your treatment, you can also speak to your radiographers.

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

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, red, sore or itchy. The skin can sometimes blister and break. 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.
- **Tiredness:** You may begin to feel tired during treatment. This tends to start after 2-3 weeks of 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.

Skin Care during Treatment

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

- 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.
- You may continue to wear deodorant, however if you are having your axilla (armpit) treated, we may advise you to stop using it.
- You will find that you may be more comfortable if you wear loose fitting clothes, preferably with cotton next to your skin.
- If your skin becomes irritated, we can give you a cream to use. The skin irritation could last for 4-6 weeks.
- If treatment is within the scalp area, wash hair with a mild shampoo and allow to dry naturally. If you want to use a hair dryer, use a cool setting. Avoid using tongs or hair straighteners.
- Shaving the area being treated may cause irritation. It is best not to shave. If however you wish to shave, use an electric razor during treatment and for a few weeks afterwards.
- If the weather is hot and sunny, avoid exposure of the treated area to bright sunlight. For example, sit in the shade, wear appropriate clothing, 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, but 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 benefits of your radiotherapy treatment outweigh any longer-term risks involved. However, you should be aware of these potential long-term effects, which may affect a small number of people. These can occur months or even years after treatment. 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. 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.
- Small veins may appear on the skin.
- 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

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

- **Cancer Support Scotland – The Calman Centre, Gartnavel Complex. Freephone 0800 652 4531 or 0141 337 8199.**

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

- **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/active

- **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**

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.

