

Advice to Patients on Completion of their Radiotherapy Treatment for Prostate Cancer



This leaflet covers the main side effects that people may experience following radiotherapy for prostate cancer. It is a summary of some of the more common side effects and how best to manage them. More detailed information can be found in the cancer specific leaflet you were given before you started your treatment.

Where can I get help or advice after my treatment finishes?

Please remember that your GP can provide valuable advice and support. Many of the side effects listed below can be reviewed and dealt with by them.

The Beatson Cancer Centre has a **Radiotherapy Advice Line** available for patients who have completed treatment. It is for **non-urgent calls**, and is an answer phone service, available Monday – Friday, 8.30am to 5pm. Please leave your name, date of birth and telephone number and a radiographer will call you back as soon as possible.

☎ 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 Telephone:

Beatson 8am-8pm ☎ 0141 301 7990

National 8pm-8am ☎ 0800 917 7711

Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist ☎ 0141 301 7614

Side effects of radiotherapy treatment

Early (acute) side effects


Radiotherapy continues to work for 10-14 days after your treatment has finished. During this time, some people find that any side effects they have experienced during treatment may become more noticeable or even slightly worse. These are called early or acute side effects. They may continue for a few weeks, but should gradually settle.

Some of the more common acute side effects are listed below:

- **Bladder** - Radiotherapy can irritate the lining of your bladder, causing:
 - » **Radiation cystitis** - Needing to pass urine more often than usual, and have a burning sensation when you do so.
 - » **Urinary frequency** - Needing to pass urine more often than normal. You may already have had this issue before starting treatment, but it may get worse during and after treatment finishes. You may feel your bladder doesn't completely empty, or you have a desire to go again soon after urinating.
 - » **Urgency** - Feeling that you need to go to the toilet urgently and have difficulty holding your urine.
 - » **Nocturia** - Waking up frequently during the night and needing to pass urine.
 - » **Haematuria** - Blood in your urine.
 - » **Changes to flow of urine** - Your urine flow may be slower, slower to start or you may notice a slight dribble at the end of urination.

You can help to reduce these side effects by:

- Drinking 1 ½ -2 litres (6-8 cups) of fluid a day.
- Stopping drinking 2 hours before going to bed and avoiding drinking during the night. This can help if you are up a lot through the night to empty your bladder.
- Avoiding or limiting alcohol.
- Avoiding caffeinated drinks. Try decaffeinated options.
See table below for suggestions:

Drinks that can irritate the bladder		Drinks that don't irritate the bladder	
Caffeinated tea and coffee		Decaffeinated tea and coffee	
Green tea		Water	
Hot chocolate		Diluting juice	
Fizzy drinks-including cola and Irn Bru		Non-acidic fresh drinks	
Caffeinated energy drinks		Herbal tea	
Fresh acidic drinks		Red bush tea	

Your bladder habits may change as a result of your treatment and side effects. As the side effects start to settle, you may need to retrain your bladder. This may help to improve how quickly you need to get to the toilet, and also how often you need to go. Below are some tips that can help with urge control:

- Distracting yourself can help you to stop thinking about your bladder.
- If you feel you need the toilet, try standing on your tiptoes.
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles quickly and repeat 5-8 times.
- Walk slowly to the toilet.
- Distract your brain: attempt to list the name of a boy and a girl for each letter of the alphabet, recite your times tables, a favourite poem, do Sudoku or sing, or anything else that will stop you thinking about your bladder.
- Try to only use the toilet if you feel you need to go. Avoid going 'just in case'.
- **Rectum (back passage)**- The wall of your back passage may become inflamed, causing:
 - » **Frequency** - Feeling the urge to empty your bowel more often during the day and perhaps at night. You may also feel like you haven't completely emptied your bowel.
 - » **Diarrhoea** - Your stools may be soft, loose or watery.
 - » **Wind** - You may pass more wind than usual and experience colicky pains.
 - » **Mucus** - You may pass a clear jellylike mucus from your back passage and there may be a little blood.
 - » **Piles (haemorrhoids)** - If you have piles or haemorrhoids or have had these treated in the past, they may get a little worse during and after treatment.

You can help to reduce these side effects by:

- » Avoiding foods that you know will make your bowels move more, for example prunes, rhubarb, hot spicy foods, curry etc.
- » Your GP may be able to prescribe treatment if your piles are painful.
- » Drinking 1 ½ -2 litres (6-8 cups) of fluid a day.
- **Tiredness/lack of energy:** Many people feel tired during radiotherapy treatment and for several weeks or months afterwards. It is important to try to continue your normal daily activities and interests. Research has shown that gentle exercise is beneficial for people who have had a cancer diagnosis both in the short and longer term. A sensible balance between rest and activity may be best. Please note, if you cycle, you may notice some discomfort. It may therefore be better to wait for a few weeks after finishing treatment.

Late side effects

Some side effects may occur months or years after your radiotherapy has finished. These are called late side effects and **may** affect a small number of people.

Some of the more common late side effects are listed below:

- **Bladder** - You may notice some blood in your urine. This can be caused by small blood vessels in your bladder being more fragile due to the radiotherapy. Sometimes they break and the blood is passed in your urine. It is important to speak to your GP as they may wish to arrange some tests to check the cause of the bleeding.
- **Incontinence**- You may experience a small amount of urine leakage. This may be more noticeable when you cough, sneeze or laugh.

- **Bowel** - About a year after treatment is finished, small blood vessels can form in the lining of the bowel. These vessels are more delicate than normal and may break down causing bleeding from the back passage. If this happens, it may seem very frightening at first, but is not usually serious. You should let your GP know as they may wish to arrange some tests to check the cause of the bleeding.

Occasionally the diarrhoea or the slight discharge of mucus that can occur during treatment does not settle. Your GP may be able to prescribe long term medication to help control it. Some people may notice an urge to move their bowels more often, particularly in the morning.

What happens next?

You will be seen by your doctor or urology nurse specialist 6-12 weeks after your radiotherapy finishes. If you do not receive an appointment within this time, please contact your consultant's secretary.

It would be helpful to ask your GP practice to check your PSA blood test the week before the date of the appointment.

If you have been receiving hormone treatment, please do not stop this until you have been advised to do so by your oncologist.

Where can I get additional information and support?

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. ☎ 0141 301 7390

There are also voluntary organisations providing information and support. These include:

- **Prostate Cancer UK:** Helpline: ☎ 0800 074 8383. There are support groups throughout the country. Please check the website to find your local group.
🌐 www.prostatecanceruk.org or call: ☎ 0141 314 0050.
- **Bowel and Bladder Community:** Help to support people who are living with conditions that affect their bladder or bowel. Whether you have a condition yourself or are a relative, friend or carer of someone who does, then you'll find all the support, information, guidance and help you need. 🌐 www.bladderandbowel.org
- **Macmillan Cancer Support:** ☎ 0808 808 0000
🌐 www.macmillan.org.uk Provides practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.
- **Maggie's Glasgow (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

- **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**
- **Macmillan Benefits Team** (within the Beatson)
☎ **0141 301 7374**
Provides free and confidential advice for people affected by cancer and their carers.
- **Beatson Cancer Centre** - if you want to find out more about our Centre please visit 🌐 **www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk**
- If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit:
www.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive
- **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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Care Opinion

We welcome your comments and feedback about our service.
If you would like to give us feedback please go to:

🌐 www.careopinion.org.uk or ☎ **0900 122 3135** or scan the QR code:



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