

Information on a Short Course of Radiotherapy to the Brain



This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy to the brain.

It describes:

- What is Radiotherapy?
- How your treatment is planned and delivered.
- 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 worries.

Your doctor or radiographer will explain specific aspects of your treatment.

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of carefully measured doses of radiation to treat cancer. Most patients having radiotherapy are treated using a high energy beam of X-rays delivered to a precise area. The aim is to destroy the cancer cells or slow down their growth. Radiotherapy is often given in several small doses over a specified period of days.

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 planning and treatment dates and times.

If you are in doubt about anything or have any questions or problems, please let us know as soon as possible.

Preparation for Treatment

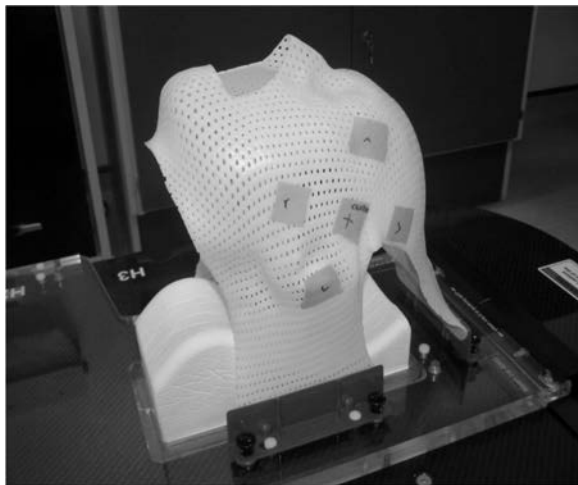
Your first appointment will be at the mould room. You will have a shell or mask made. The shell is important because:

- It enables your radiographers to give your treatment in exactly the same area each day.
- It helps to support your head and keep it from moving during treatment.

The mould room is located in the Radiotherapy Department on Level 0. When you arrive for your appointment, please report to the reception desk on level 0.

Mould Room

The mould room staff will warm a special sheet of plastic and mould it to the shape of your head. The shell has lots of small holes in it and an open area over your nose and mouth, allowing you to breathe normally. The process of making the shell is completely painless and takes approximately 30 minutes.



Picture 1: Shell

If you have a beard and/or moustache, we advise you to shave it off or trim it short before coming to the mould room.

Before your course of radiotherapy can begin, the treatment must be carefully planned. This is done at the CT simulator. The CT simulator is located in the Radiotherapy Department on Level 0.

CT Simulator

The CT Simulator is very similar to a normal CT scanner. It takes images to allow your Doctor and radiographers to plan your treatment. This appointment may be on the same day as your mould room appointment.



Picture 2: CT Simulator

- Your radiographers will help you lie on your back on the CT couch. You will wear your shell. The couch is quite hard but your radiographers will make you as comfortable as possible.
- They will put some marks on your shell. They will then leave the room to carry out the scan. Your radiographers can see you through a window so if you need them you can raise your hand and they will come straight in. The scan will only take a couple of minutes.
- This scan is used to plan your treatment. There are no results from it.
- You will start your treatment within a few days of your CT scan.

Treatment

The machines used to deliver your radiotherapy are called linear accelerators or linacs. They are located on level 0 of the Radiotherapy Department.



Picture 3: Linear Accelerator

Your radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts. The number of treatments can vary, but as a guide it is usually between 5 and 10 treatments. Your radiotherapy will be given in small doses, Monday to Friday, but not at the weekend.

Your radiographers will position you on the treatment couch just as you were in the CT simulator. You will wear your shell. The lights in the room will dim for a few minutes while your radiographers ensure you are in the correct position for treatment. They leave the room while the machine is switched on. This is only for a minute or so and they will watch you the whole time on closed circuit TV. If you need the radiographers, please raise your hand and they will come in.

The treatment is painless and you will feel no differently afterwards. The whole process only takes about 10 minutes.

Effects of Treatment

We treat each patient as an individual. The effects of treatment may vary from one patient to another. The following is a general guide to some of the effects you may experience.

- **Hair loss:** You will lose the hair on your head, and occasionally your eyebrow hair. This might not happen until after the course of treatment is finished. It starts as a thinning process. Your hair will usually grow back, although this may take a few months. Sometimes it grows back differently to how it was. It may be patchy, thinner or have a different texture than before.
- **Tiredness:** You will feel quite tired during and after your radiotherapy. The tiredness can last for a few weeks. Try to get plenty of rest, as well as a little gentle exercise, if possible.
- **Headache:** Some people experience a headache, particularly after the first treatment. This usually settles down quite quickly and you can take any painkillers you would normally use for it.
- **Nausea:** You may occasionally feel a bit sick. Your doctor can prescribe something to help with this and it should settle within a couple of weeks.
- **Hearing:** Some patients feel that their ears are blocked or their hearing becomes dull after radiotherapy. This usually gets better over time.

Washing your hair

During your radiotherapy and for a week or two after it is finished you should:

- Wash your hair with lukewarm water and gently towel dry.
- Avoid using a hairdryer, tongs or straighteners as they could irritate your scalp.
- Avoid using any hair products such as gel, mousse or hair spray.

Coping with you hair loss

Your doctor will have told you that you will lose your hair as a result of your radiotherapy treatment. Although this is mostly temporary, it can still be very distressing. We can arrange for you to get a wig. Your doctor or radiographers will talk to you about this.

Some people initially decide not to have a wig but change their mind once their hair starts to come out. If you change your mind, it is not a problem. You can contact the information and support radiographer on the number at the end of the leaflet and they will arrange this.

Steroid Treatment

Some people who are having radiotherapy treatment to the whole brain will need to take steroid tablets (dexamethasone). The steroids help with any symptoms that you may have which can sometimes become slightly worse with radiotherapy. Your family doctor (GP) or specialist will prescribe the steroids after discussing dosage and side effects with you. If you are unsure about anything or want more information about steroids, please ask the radiographers who will contact your doctor for you.

After treatment ends

Any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down. The tiredness can take a few weeks to settle. If you are taking steroids you will continue to take them after the treatment has finished. Your oncologist (hospital doctor) will write to your GP about reducing the dose of steroids you are taking. You should not stop taking them suddenly as this can cause problems and make you feel unwell. The dose should be gradually reduced before you stop and your doctor will work with you on this.

Your hospital doctor will arrange to see you about 4 – 6 weeks after your treatment has finished.

What do I do if I feel ill?

If you suddenly feel unwell and unable to come for treatment, contact your GP and if possible, let the staff at the treatment room know. If you feel able to come to the department, tell the radiographers that you are unwell as soon as you arrive and they will arrange for a doctor or nurse to see you.

If you become unwell after your treatment has finished you must contact your GP. If out of hours, please contact NHS 24 on ☎ 111. Your GP or NHS 24 are able to contact the Beatson if necessary, should they require advice regarding your care.

Where can I get help?

Many people already have had a lot of information and support from their own district, Macmillan, community or oncology nurse at another hospital. Remember that they can also help you with any worries or concerns at this time, and because you know them already, they can provide invaluable help and support during and after your treatment. So please remember to give them a call if you need to.

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 and information in the Beatson is available from:

- Information and Support Radiographer ☎ 0141 301 7427
- 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

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, 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:

Beatson 8am-8pm ☎ 0141 301 7990

National 8pm-8am ☎ 0800 917 7711

Counselling and Clinical Psychology

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 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
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.	
🌐 www.macmillan.org.uk	
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	☎ 0800 652 4531
Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups.	
🌐 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

NHS 24	☎ 111
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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 telephone:

☎ 0900 122 3135 or scan the QR code:



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