

Information for patients receiving radiotherapy for bone pain



This leaflet is for patients who will have a single or short course of radiotherapy treatment for bone pain. It describes:

- What is radiotherapy?
- Your radiotherapy planning and treatment.
- 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 concerns.

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

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of carefully measured doses of radiation to treat cancer. 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.

Therapy radiographers operate the radiotherapy planning and treatment machines and will be able to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. We have both male and female staff.

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.

Planning appointment - CT simulator

Before radiotherapy begins, your treatment must be carefully planned. You will have a CT scan done at one of our CT simulators. The images from this scan allow your doctor and radiographers to plan your treatment. There are no results from this scan.



Image 1: CT simulator

Your radiographers will check some details with you and explain the procedure. They may have to ask you to remove some items of clothing. They will give you a gown to wear.

Your radiographers will scan the area to be treated. They will help you onto the couch into the position necessary for your treatment. The couch is quite hard but they will do their best to make you as comfortable as possible.

Your radiographers will put temporary pen marks and stickers on your skin in the area to be treated. They may have to remove your gown to do this, but they will keep you covered wherever possible. It is very important that you stay as still as you can during this time and try to relax and breathe normally. Your radiographers will move the couch into the scanner and 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 painless.

Once the scan is finished, your radiographers will ask permission to 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.

Treatment

You will have your treatment on the same day or within a few days of your CT simulator appointment. If your treatment is on the same day, you may be in the department for a few hours. We advise that if you are currently taking medication for pain, that you bring it with you.

Your radiographers will explain everything before your treatment starts. You may be given your treatment as one single treatment or a short course of between 4 and 10 treatments. You will have your treatment on a linear accelerator, which is a special type of X-ray machine.



Picture 2: Linear accelerator

Your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT simulator. The lights in the room will dim for a few minutes while they do this. The machine will move round about you, but it won't touch you. Your radiographers leave the room while the machine is on, but they will monitor you on closed circuit TV. It is important that you keep still during the treatment. It is painless and takes around 10 minutes.

Effects of radiotherapy treatment

It is important to remember that this is a general guide. Everyone is different and the side effects from radiotherapy treatment will vary. Below is a list of possible side effects:

- **Skin:** In the **treated area** your skin may become pink and itchy. You may bath or shower with your usual soap, provided the water is not too hot (lukewarm). Pat your skin dry with a soft towel. If your skin becomes red or itchy we will give or advise you on any creams we feel may help.
- **Tiredness:** 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.
- **Pain:** After the radiotherapy you may feel your pain is worse for a day or two. This can be an effect of the treatment. We would advise you to keep taking your painkillers and if necessary discuss increasing them with your GP.
- **Nausea:** If the area we are treating is near your tummy, you may feel sick. Your doctor will give you some tablets to help this. If you do feel sick, it should settle down after a few days.
- **Diarrhoea:** If you have had treatment to an area that includes part of your bowel such as your hip or lower back, you may have some diarrhoea. Your doctor can give you something to help and it should settle fairly quickly.

What do I do if I feel ill?

If you suddenly feel unwell and not able to come for treatment, contact your family doctor (GP) and let the staff at your treatment room know. If you feel able to come in to the department, tell your radiographers that you are unwell as soon as you arrive. They can arrange for a doctor to see you.

If you become unwell after your treatment has finished you must contact your GP or NHS 24. Please also see below for urgent symptoms, where contacting The Cancer Treatment Helpline may be more appropriate.

After treatment has finished

Any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually improve. The tiredness may take a good few weeks to settle.

It is important to remember that the treatment takes a few weeks to work. It may be one to four weeks before you get any pain relief from the treatment. You should continue to take any painkillers you are on until you notice an improvement. Your oncology doctor will arrange a follow up appointment after your treatment has finished. They will let you know when this is likely to be.

Where can I get help?

Information & 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 -**
☎ **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. Please visit or phone on ☎ **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 & 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 distressing time for you and those closest to you. At times it can also be difficult coping with treatment but you don't have to cope on your own. Within the department, we have a counselling and clinical psychology service that may be able to help with worries and difficulties you might be having before, during or after treatment.

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**

Provides information and support with a regular programme of courses. Counselling service available.

🌐 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.
- If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit: 🌐 www.nhs.uk/getactive
- **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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