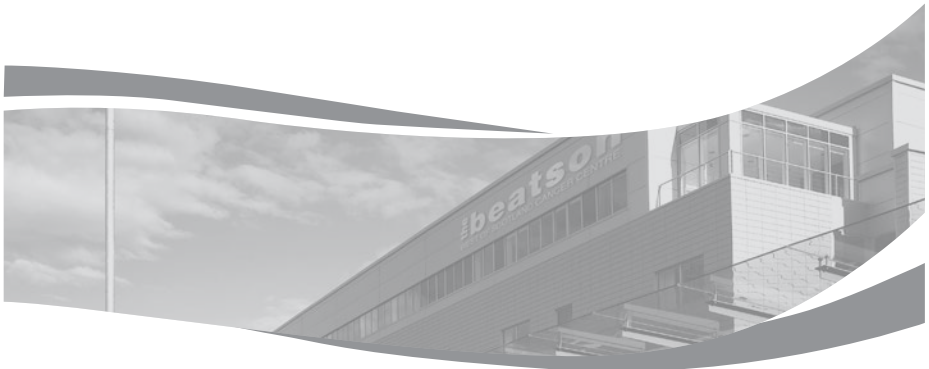


# Information for Patients

# Radiotherapy to Para-Aortic Lymph Nodes



The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre  
1053 Great Western Road,  
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This leaflet is for patients receiving radiotherapy to the para-aortic lymph nodes of the abdomen. It describes:

- **What is radiotherapy?**
- **How your radiotherapy is planned and treated.**
- **The side effects you may experience during and after treatment and how best to cope with them.**
- **Who to contact if you have any questions or concerns.**

## 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. The machine used to deliver the treatment is called a linear accelerator.

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.

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

## Planning your treatment

Before your course of radiotherapy can begin, we must carefully plan your treatment. You will have a scan at the CT simulator. Your doctor will use the images from this scan to plan your treatment. There are no results from it.



**CT Scanner**

Your radiographers will give you a gown and ask you to undress. They will show you into the scanning room.

It is important that you are in the same position each day you come for your treatment. To help with this, your radiographers will use a special bag, called a vac bag. This is a bit like a bean bag. When the air is removed from it, it hardens and moulds around your shape. Your radiographers will ask you to raise your arms above your head and hold onto your elbows. They will then mould the bag around your arms and shoulders. This will help to support you. Let your radiographers know if you are uncomfortable as you will have to lie in this position for each treatment.



**Vac bag**

They will then put some temporary pen marks on your skin and place some small markers on top of these. These markers show up on your scan.

Your radiographers will move the couch into the starting position and leave the room. They will monitor you at all times. Once the scan is complete the temporary marks will then be

replaced with permanent marks called tattoos. These marks are tiny, no larger than a pin head. They are important reference marks that your radiographers will use to position you for your treatment every day.

## **Contrast (dye)**

You may need to have an injection of contrast (dye) that will help us to see the area we want to treat more clearly. Your doctor or radiographer will put a small needle (cannula) into a vein. The needle is removed leaving a small hollow plastic tube in your vein. We will tape it in place and it will stay in position during the scan. We will inject the dye through this tube. It may feel a little cold but you should not feel any discomfort. You may need this dye for the CT planning process, but not for treatment appointments.

## **Treatment**

Your radiotherapy treatment will be given in daily doses, Monday to Friday, but not at the weekend.



**Picture 2 - Linear Accelerator**

Your radiographers will ask you to undress and lie on the treatment couch just as you did at the CT simulator. They will position you in your vac bag. The room lights will dim for a few minutes and the machine will move into the treatment position. The machine will move round about you but it won't touch you.

Once your radiographers are happy, they will leave the room to start your treatment. They might take some X-rays pictures before they begin your treatment. These are used to check your position. Once they are happy, they will then start your treatment. Your radiographers will be monitoring you from outside the room on CCTV. You won't see or feel anything. It is just like having an X-ray or scan. The treatment usually only takes 10-15 minutes.

## **Effects of treatment (early)**

We treat each patient as an individual and the effects of treatment may vary from one patient to another. Your doctor, radiographer, or clinical nurse specialist will explain specific aspects of your treatment.

- You may feel nauseous after the treatment but your Doctor can prescribe medication for this.
- The treatment may also cause diarrhoea. Please let us know if this is a problem.
- You may experience heartburn during the course of treatment. This is more likely to affect individuals with a previous history of heartburn.
- You may lose your hair in the treated area. This may happen towards the end of treatment or within the few weeks of treatment finishing. This is usually temporary, although in some patients it may not grow back.
- The skin in the treated area can be more sensitive and may become pink and itchy. This tends to be a couple of weeks into your treatment. It can be relieved with creams, however it is important that you only use creams recommended by us.

- You may feel tired during the treatment; again this tends to happen a couple of weeks in and may last for several months afterwards.

## **Effects of treatment (late)**

We believe that the benefit of your radiotherapy treatment far outweighs any risks involved. However, there are potential long term effects that may affect a small number of people.

Your doctor will explain specific individual issues to you personally. The following is a general guide:

- There is a risk that you may develop a peptic ulcer after your course of radiotherapy. This can be soothed with the use of medication and changes to your diet. Please ask your doctor for more information.
- Your skin, in the area treated, will always be sensitive to the effects of the sun especially during the first year after your treatment. It is advisable to protect yourself with a sunscreen with both UVA/UVB protection with a minimum of SPF 50.
- Very rarely radiotherapy can cause tumours. Although this is a serious consequence of your treatment, it is important to bear in mind that it is very rare. If it does happen it is likely to be years after your initial treatment.

## **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.
- It is important that you eat well and choose from a wide variety of foods. Keep to a normal diet at the start of your treatment, although it is best to avoid foods that may make your bowels loose for example, prunes, hot spicy food etc.
- You should bath or shower during treatment, but do not have the water too hot and pat your skin dry with a soft towel.

## **After treatment ends**

Remember that any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down. Your doctor will arrange to see you around 6-8 weeks after your treatment has finished.

## **Where can I get help?**

All our staff are here to make sure your treatment goes as smoothly as possible. They will try to help with any questions or problems you may have. Further specialist help and information 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. Please visit or phone on

**☎ 0141 301 7390.** Open Monday to Friday 8.15am to 4.15pm.

The Cancer Centre has a **Radiotherapy Advice Line** available for patients who have completed treatment. This is an answer phone service manned by experienced radiographers.

Available Monday - Friday. Please leave your name, date of birth and contact 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.
- Suddenly 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 service**

This leaflet deals with the physical aspect of your treatment, but your emotional well being is just as important to us. 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 might be helpful to you, please ask the 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 Centre, 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](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 are available.

🌐 [www.cancersupportscotland.org](http://www.cancersupportscotland.org)

**Macmillan Benefits Team (within the Beatson):**

☎ 0141 301 7374. Provides free and confidential advice for people and their carers who are affected by cancer.

**Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre:** For further information on our Cancer Centre please visit our website

🌐 [www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk)

**NHS 24:** ☎ 111

If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit:

🌐 [www.nhs.uk/getactive](http://www.nhs.uk/getactive)

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