

Information for Patients

# Radiotherapy to the Vulva



# **Radiotherapy to the Vulva**

This leaflet is for patients receiving electron radiotherapy to the vulva. It describes:

- The radiotherapy planning and treatment.
- The effects you may experience during and after treatment.
- How best to cope with these effects.

It is important that you understand the radiotherapy and potential side effects before giving your consent for treatment. If you have any questions or concerns please let us know as soon as possible.

## **Preparation for treatment**

Before you begin your treatment, we must be carefully plan it. The planning takes place in a mark up room. When you are in the mark up room and the treatment room, we will ask you to remove your trousers or skirt. We will also ask you to slip your underwear down to uncover the area that is being treated. We will maintain your dignity by covering you whenever possible.

- Two therapy radiographers and a doctor will put some pen marks on your skin to mark the area to be treated.
- They will take some measurements.
- It may be necessary to take a photo of the area to help your radiographers position you each day you come for treatment.
- It is sometimes helpful to mark the area to be treated with permanent marks. These are tiny tattoos which look just like freckles.
- The whole process should take around 15-20 minutes.

# Treatment

**Picture 1: Linear accelerator**



Radiotherapy treatment is planned and delivered by therapy radiographers. The treatment machine is called a linear accelerator (see picture 1). Your radiographers will explain the treatment process to you before you start.

- Your treatment will be given daily, Monday to Friday.
- The treatment is painless and usually takes about 10 minutes.
- You will lie in the position you were in when your treatment was planned in the mark up room.
- Your radiographers will dim the lights for a short time while they position the treatment machine.
- The machine may come close to you and be in contact with your skin. It should not be uncomfortable. If you feel uncomfortable, please let your radiographers know.
- Your radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on.
- The machine will be on for about a minute.
- You won't feel anything during the treatment.

- Your radiographers will be watching you the whole time on a television screen outside.

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your radiographer.

## 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 tired. It is also important that you try to continue 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 or see the 'Where to get help' section at the end of this leaflet.

## Early effects of treatment

Each patient is an individual, and the effects of treatment may vary from person to person. **Radiotherapy only affects the area being treated.**

During radiotherapy the area being treated will gradually respond in a way similar to an 'inflammation'. This usually starts a few weeks into treatment and settles 3-4 weeks after treatment ends. This is a general guide to some of the effects you **may** experience.

**Skin:** The skin in the treated area will be more sensitive and may become itchy, pink or red. Your skin may also become moist and break. Again this tends to be a couple of weeks into treatment. This can be treated with creams or gels; however it is **very** important that you only use those given to you or recommended by the radiotherapy staff.

**Vagina:** You may develop a mild clear discharge. If you have a heavy, creamy, or discoloured discharge (yellow, green or brown) you should let your doctors or radiographers know. The vagina can also become a little inflamed which may make it more sensitive or even sore.

**Sexual intercourse:** We generally recommend that during treatment you should avoid having sexual intercourse. When your treatment has finished it may be possible to resume normal sexual activity. Please discuss this with your doctor if you want further advice.

**Tiredness:** You may feel tired during your treatment and possibly for several weeks after treatment is complete.

**Pain and discomfort:** You may feel pain and discomfort in the area being treated. This will vary between individual patients.

You will be seen at a review clinic once a week. Your specialist nurse or radiographer will manage any side effects you may be experiencing.

If you have had surgery and/or chemotherapy, any concerns you may have can also be managed at this review clinic.

## **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 wash but make sure the water is not too hot (lukewarm). Try not to rub the treated area. Do not use a flannel or any other abrasive cloths. Dry carefully by gently patting your skin, particularly in any skin folds.
- Please do not use any personal feminine hygiene products, creams or lotions on the treated area as they may irritate your skin.
- Do not use any hair removal products on the area as they could irritate your skin.

- We advise you not to swim during your treatment as the chlorine may irritate your skin. You can start again after your skin has settled.
- You may be more comfortable during treatment if you wear loose fitting clothes, preferably with cotton next to your skin.

## **Late effects of treatment**

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.

Remember, you should consider the possibility of these risks against the potential problems of not having the treatment that has been recommended by your doctor.

## **After treatment ends**

Any side effects you have experienced should start to improve a few weeks after you finish your treatment. The tiredness may take a little longer.

You may begin washing normally once your skin no longer looks red or feels itchy. If your skin has peeled or become moist and sore, this may take longer to heal. If you are still uncomfortable please follow the skin care advice above until your first follow up appointment. Your radiotherapy doctor will arrange to see you 4-6 weeks after treatment ends, either at the Beatson or the hospital where you first met them.

## Where can I get help?

All the 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 is available from:

- Gynaecological Nurse Specialist (Beatson)  
**☎ 0141 301 7615**
- Macmillan Specialist Gynaecological Radiographer  
**☎ 0141 301 7449**
- Information and Support Radiographer: **☎ 0141 301 7427**

The Beatson Cancer Centre has a **Radiotherapy Advice Line** available for patients who have completed treatment. It is an answer phone service which is checked at regular intervals Monday- Friday. Please leave your name, telephone number and a brief description of your concern. We 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.

**For Urgent Calls:**

**Beatson 8am-8pm ☎ 0141 301 7990**

**National 8pm-8am ☎ 0800 917 7711**

**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**.



## Counselling and Psychology Service

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. Within the department we have a clinical psychology service that may be able to help with worries and difficulties you might be having, before, during or after treatment. 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:

<b>Macmillan Cancer Support:</b>	 <b>0808 808 0000</b>  <a href="http://www.macmillan.org.uk">www.macmillan.org.uk</a>
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.	
<b>Maggie's Gartnavel</b> <b>Maggie's Lanarkshire,</b> <b>Monklands Hospital</b> <b>Maggie's Forth Valley</b>	 <b>0141 357 2269</b>  <b>01236 771 199</b>  <b>01324 868 069</b>  <a href="http://www.maggies.org">www.maggies.org</a>
Provides information and support with a regular programme of courses. Counselling service available.	
<b>Cancer Support Scotland –</b> <b>The Calman Centre,</b> <b>Gartnavel Complex.</b>	<b>Freephone</b>  <b>0800 652 4531</b>  <a href="http://www.cancersupportscotland.org">www.cancersupportscotland.org</a>
Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups. Complementary therapies available.	

<b>Beatson Cancer Charity</b>	<b>☎ 0141 301 7667</b>
Provides support for patients and families within the Beatson Cancer Centre. Services available for in-patients.	
<b>Macmillan Benefits Team</b> (within the Beatson)	<b>☎ 0141 301 7374</b>
Provides free and confidential advice for people affected by cancer and their carers.	
<b>Cancer Research UK</b>	
This website provides information on organisations and websites that help and support people with vulval cancer.	
🌐 <a href="http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/vulval-cancer">www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/vulval-cancer</a>	
If you are interested in finding out about becoming more active, please visit:	
🌐 <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/getactive">www.nhs.uk/getactive</a>	
<b>Beatson Cancer Centre</b>	
If you would like to know more about our Centre please visit:	
🌐 <a href="http://www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk">www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk</a>	
<b>NHS 24</b>	<b>☎ 111</b>

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.

## Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## 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](http://www.careopinion.org.uk) or telephone:

☎ 0900 122 3135 or scan the QR code:

