

Information for Patients

Receiving a Short Course of Radiotherapy



This leaflet is for patients receiving a short course of radiotherapy. 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.

What is Radiotherapy?

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

Your doctor has decided to give you this treatment to help alleviate some of your symptoms. These symptoms will vary depending on the area needing treatment, but they may include:

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Areas of swelling causing discomfort.

Most patients having radiotherapy are treated using a high energy beam of X-rays delivered to a precise area, by a machine called a linear accelerator.

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

You will receive a list of appointments which will include planning and treatment dates and times. You will be attending for 1- 5 treatments.

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

Preparation for treatment

Before radiotherapy begins, we must plan your treatment carefully. You will have a scan at the CT simulator (a machine similar to a CT scanner). The images from this scan allow your doctor and radiographers to plan your treatment. There are no results from this scan.

Picture 1- CT scanner



We will scan the area needing treatment with you lying in the position necessary for your radiotherapy. If you are uncomfortable let your radiographers know. They will do their best to make you more comfortable. It is very important that you stay as still as you can during this time. Try to relax and breathe normally. Once you are in the correct position, your radiographers will place temporary pen marks and stickers on your skin. They will then leave the room to start your scan. The couch will move in and out of the scanner a few times. There is nothing to see or feel. The scan will take 2-3 minutes.

Once the scan is finished, your radiographers will 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.

Radiotherapy treatment

You will have treatment the same day or within a few days of your CT simulator appointment.

If your planning and treatment appointment are on the same day, you may be in the department for several hours. Please bring any medication with you that you may need.

Your radiographers will explain everything before treatment starts.

Picture 2: Linear accelerator



Each time you come for treatment your radiographers will position you just as you were in the CT simulator. The machine will move around you but it won't touch. When your radiographers have positioned you and the machine, they will leave the room. They are watching you all the time on closed circuit TV.

Before your treatment starts, your radiographers may take some X-ray pictures. These are used to confirm your position. You will not get any results from them.

There is nothing to feel during treatment or immediately afterwards. Your treatment usually takes around 10 minutes. It is important that you stay as still as you can during treatment and breathe normally.

If you have any questions please ask.

Effects of treatment

It is important to remember that this is a general guide. Everyone is different and the side effects from radiotherapy treatment will vary. Your doctor and radiographers will be able to give you more specific information when you come for treatment. Some common questions that patients ask are detailed below:

Can I have a bath or a shower?

Radiotherapy only affects the area of the body that we are treating. Wash as normal, ensuring that the water is not too hot and pat your skin dry. Your skin in the treated area may feel dry, pink or itchy. We recommend using a moisturiser on this area. A cream such as Diprobase or Aveeno is ideal (you can get this from the Chemist or your GP).

Will I feel any different after treatment?

During treatment you will not feel or see anything. However once your treatment has finished you may feel more tired than usual. The tiredness can last for some time after your treatment has finished.

Will I lose my hair?

You may lose hair in the treated area, but it will usually re-grow a few months after treatment has ended.

Will I feel sick?

If you are having treatment in the abdomen (tummy) area, you may feel sick after the treatment has finished or later in the evening. Your doctor will give you tablets to help if this is likely.

Will I have diarrhoea?

If you are having treatment to your lower back, hip or pelvis, you may experience some diarrhoea. Your doctor can give you something for this.

What do I do if I feel unwell?

If you suddenly feel unwell and are unable to come for treatment, contact your GP and also let your treatment unit know. **It is important that you try to attend each appointment.**

If you manage to come for your radiotherapy but feel unwell let your radiographers know as soon as you arrive. They can arrange for someone to see you.

The treatment may at first make any symptoms you have slightly worse. However any symptoms that have developed because of the treatment will gradually settle down. If you feel they aren't improving 2-4 weeks after finishing your treatment, please contact your GP.

If you are unwell and have completed your treatment, you must contact your own GP. Please also see below for urgent symptoms, where contacting the Cancer Treatment Helpline may be more appropriate.

After treatment ends

Your doctor will arrange to see you at a follow-up appointment after your treatment is completed. We will send you the appointment details.

Where can I get help?

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 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. **Tel: 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 well-being 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 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 🌐 www.macmillan.org.uk
Providing practical, medical, emotional and financial advice for those affected by cancer.	
Maggie's Gartnavel Maggie's Lanarkshire, Monklands Hospital Maggie's Forth Valley	☎ 0141 357 2269 ☎ 01236 771 199 ☎ 01324 868 069 🌐 www.maggies.org
Provides information and support with a regular programme of courses. Counselling service available.	

Cancer Support Scotland – The Calman Centre, Gartnavel Complex.	Freephone ☎ 0800 652 4531 🌐 www.cancersupportscotland.org
Provides emotional and practical support on a one-to-one basis and through community based groups. Complementary therapies available.	
Beatson Cancer Charity	☎ 0141 301 7667
Provides support for patients and families within the Beatson Cancer Centre. Services available for in-patients.	
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.nhsggc.org.uk/getactive	
Beatson Cancer Centre	
If you would like to know more about our Centre please visit:	
🌐 www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk	
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.

Notes

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:

