

## Patient information factsheet

# Radiotherapy treatment

We have given you this factsheet because your doctors have recommended you have radiotherapy treatment for cancer. Radiotherapy involves the use of high-energy radiation and is commonly used to treat cancer. This factsheet explains what to expect at your radiotherapy treatment appointments. It aims to answer some of the initial questions you are likely to have but if you would like more information or have any concerns, please speak to a radiographer.

### On the day of your treatment

Please eat and drink as usual before your treatment.

When you arrive in the radiotherapy department, check in at reception and take a seat in the waiting area.

We will ask you to change into a hospital gown for your treatment. We may ask you to do this before going into the treatment room.

### During your treatment

When you enter the treatment room, we will ask you to confirm your name, date of birth, and address. This will be repeated each time you attend for treatment.

The radiographers will carefully position you for your treatment, using the reference marks applied at your CT planning scan. It is important that you remain still so that we can deliver your treatment accurately.

Radiotherapy treatment is painless. Each session usually last for 10 to 15 minutes. Your radiographers will be able to answer any questions you may have about what to expect.

Once your radiotherapy treatment is complete, you are free to leave and continue your day as normal.

### Side effects

Radiotherapy can cause side effects. You may notice these during your treatment or after the course of treatment is complete.

It is important to remember that treatment reactions are individual and the severity of any side effects varies from person to person. Side effects will depend on the area being treated.

Please discuss any changes or concerns about side effects with your radiographers.

## Effects on the skin

Over time, the skin in the treatment area may become red and itchy. You should:

- treat the area gently
- avoid vigorous rubbing and instead pat skin dry with a soft towel
- avoid very hot or very cold water when you wash
- use your normal washing products (do not change brands or use a new product while you are having radiotherapy)
- moisturise sparingly with a moisturiser that you have used previously
- wear loose fitting clothes made from natural fibres that will not irritate
- avoid exposing the treated area to the sun or cold wind

## Tiredness (fatigue)

You may become more tired as the treatment progresses. We would encourage you to drink plenty of fluids and do gentle exercise to help reduce tiredness.

## Diarrhoea (loose bowel movements)

If you are having treatment to the pelvis, you may notice a change in your bowel habits and your bowel movements may become more loose than normal. You should follow a low fibre diet to minimise this. For more information, please speak to a radiographer.

## Nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting

You may feel nauseous or vomit, especially if the treatment area is around your upper abdomen. This can be controlled using medicines called anti-emetics. These can be prescribed by your GP or hospital doctor.

## Coughing, breathlessness and soreness when swallowing

Radiotherapy treatment to the chest area can result in a cough. You may cough up blood or phlegm. If you usually experience breathlessness, this may worsen when you have radiotherapy. It is also common to experience soreness when you swallow. This can be made easier by eating a softer diet. Your doctor may also be able to prescribe medications to help.

## Headaches

You may notice you have more headaches than usual, especially if you are having treatment to your head. You can take your usual pain relief medicine to control this, such as paracetamol. If your headaches are persistent and you are concerned, please discuss it with a radiographer.

## Hair loss

Hair loss during radiotherapy is not uncommon. Hair loss can be slow and gradual, so may not occur until after your course of treatment is complete.

Always discuss any symptoms that are worrying you with your radiographers or doctor.

## Frequently asked questions

### Will I be radioactive?

You will not be radioactive, so you are safe to be around family and friends.

### Do I feel anything as the treatment is happening?

No, the treatment is quick and painless.

## Can I swim?

We would normally encourage physical exercise. However, swimming in chlorinated water can dry your skin out further. This may increase the likelihood of a skin reaction.

## Can I continue with my normal activities after treatment?

Yes. However, you may have to make adjustments if you feel tired or unwell.

## Can I miss treatments?

We would advise that you do not miss a treatment once you have started. However, you may find gaps in your appointment schedule due to machine services or public holidays. We work hard to minimise these gaps and you may on occasion be asked to attend for treatment on a weekend or public holiday.

## Useful information

### Parking

Blue car park is situated outside the oncology centre, following directions for the eye unit. Parking spaces are limited, so please allow plenty of time to park.

Patients having radiotherapy treatment are entitled to a discount on parking. Remember to validate your ticket at the radiotherapy reception before paying at the parking machine.

### Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre

This is located on B level in the East Wing Courtyard at Southampton General Hospital. Opening hours are Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm. Drop-in sessions are available or you can book an appointment by calling: **023 8120 6037**.

### Contact us

If you have urgent symptoms relating to your current radiotherapy treatment, please call the **acute oncology service** at Southampton General Hospital on **023 8120 1345**.

This number is answered 24 hours, seven days a week, but is only for treatment-related symptoms. This number is **not** for general queries such as rearranging appointments or hospital transport.

If your symptoms are not urgent, you can speak to one of the radiographers when you attend for your radiotherapy treatment.

In an emergency call **999**.

For any non-urgent queries, please contact the radiotherapy reception.

### Radiotherapy reception

Telephone: **023 8120 8568** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

### Useful links

**NHS Choices – Radiotherapy side effects:**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/radiotherapy/side-effects/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/radiotherapy/side-effects/)

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **[www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)**