

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Treatment for Gynaecological Cancer

Introduction

As part of your treatment plan your doctor has recommended radiotherapy treatment at the Arden Centre. The aim of this booklet is to provide you with information about the centre and about radiotherapy including the possible side effects of your treatment.

Please read this information and ask any questions that you may have. Contact numbers are provided at the end of this booklet.

Where is the Arden Centre?

The Arden Centre is situated in the west wing of University Hospital Coventry. Please visit the University Hospital web site for up to date maps and directions:

www.uhcv.nhs.uk .

How shall I travel?

By car

You can drive whilst having radiotherapy treatment unless you have been advised not to for another reason.

Sat Nav postcode: CV2 2DX

At busy times it can be very difficult to park so please allow extra time. There are several visitor car parks across the site and there are drop-off points near the main entrance and the Women's and Children's entrance which allow for 10 minutes of free parking. Disabled car parking facilities are located near the main entrance. Charges apply in all car parks and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) is live across all visitor car parks, this means that our car parks no longer issue tickets at barriers and instead read your number plate as you enter. Payment is then required at one of the payment machines before exiting the car park and can be made using cash, card or contactless. Payment can also be made by telephone or online before midnight, see the trust website for details.



Patient Information

However, you are entitled to free parking whilst on radiotherapy treatment, you will need to give your registration number to the Arden Centre receptionist on arrival, if you don't know your registration number we suggest you make a note of it or take a photo of the number plate. Please note that free parking does not include clinic appointments, complementary therapy and counselling appointments, all of which must be paid for.

Public Transport

Many bus routes include the hospital with buses driving onto the site, stopping close to the main entrance. **For more information about bus services to University Hospital call the traveline on: 0870 608 2608 or visit www.networkwestmidlands.com.**

Hospital Transport

Hospital transport is available where there is a medical need, not for social or financial reasons.

If you receive Disability Living Allowance Mobility Component or have a vehicle under the mobility scheme you may not be entitled to access hospital transport.

If you need hospital transport and feel that you are eligible you will need to book it yourself, giving 48 hours notice. You will need to telephone:-

West Midlands Ambulance Service

01926 310312 (for bookings only)

01926 488410 (for queries on day of travel only)

Leicestershire Ambulance Service / Arriva / Ambuline

0845 2669662

Northamptonshire Ambulance / NSL

0843 2086888

Worcestershire Acute Trust Transport Service

0121 3079116 (for bookings)

01926 310311 (for queries on day of travel)

In most cases you will not be able to bring anyone with you. Whilst your transport will be booked to get you to the hospital for your appointment time this cannot be guaranteed but you will be treated as soon as possible after you arrive. Due to the demand on the hospital transport service patients will often be waiting at the Arden Centre to be taken home for some considerable time. We advise that, where possible, patients make their own travel arrangements. If you have to rely on the hospital transport service, please ensure that you bring food, drinks and any medication that you may need for the day with you. There is a refreshment kiosk available to buy snacks and drinks which is open from 10am-4pm.

Transport Schemes

There are transport schemes operating in some areas. These schemes will charge a mileage rate which varies. For more information please ask to speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

Patient Information

Prescriptions

All cancer patients are entitled to free prescriptions. If you haven't already got an exemption card please ask a member of staff for an application form.

Appointments

The department is usually open from 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday and is closed at weekends and on public holidays.

Radiotherapy treatment machines are very complex, they are maintained by a team of in house physicists and technicians. Delays in treatment can occur due to machine breakdowns and servicing.

Breaks in treatment due to public holidays and machine maintenance do not affect most people's treatment. However, some patients may be asked to come in for treatment on these days, when a different treatment machine could be used.

It is not advisable for you to miss any other appointments, but if it is unavoidable please talk to the radiographers who are treating you.

The radiographers arrange treatment appointment times. Every effort will be made to give you times that you prefer, but with a heavy workload this cannot be guaranteed. It is important that we have a contact telephone number for you as we often have to telephone patients at short notice, about appointments or with other information. If your telephone is set to bar incoming calls from withheld numbers, please give us an alternative telephone number.

Consent forms

Before you undergo this procedure you will be required to sign a consent form which indicates that your doctor has explained the treatment procedure and any possible side effects to you.

Pacemakers

If you have a pacemaker please mention this to your doctor and the radiographers before your first treatment.

Pregnancy

If you are, or become, pregnant at any time before or during your treatment it is important to inform a member of staff as soon as possible. There is a significant risk to an unborn baby from radiotherapy.

For advice on contraception please speak to your consultant or GP.

Chemotherapy

Your doctor may also prescribe chemotherapy to be administered during your course of radiotherapy. You will be given specific written information and consented separately for this.

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells in the area being treated. Radiotherapy can damage normal cells in the treatment area too but they can usually repair themselves, whereas cancer cells can't. The damage to normal cells results in some side effects but radiotherapy is planned very carefully to avoid treating as much healthy tissue as possible in order to reduce these side effects.

There are 2 types of radiotherapy. External beam radiotherapy is given externally using a machine called a Linear Accelerator. Brachytherapy is given internally using a machine called a HDR Selectron Unit. Many patients have both types of treatment. If you are to have brachytherapy treatment, you will be given a separate booklet.

Both male and female staff will treat you. We are a teaching hospital and have student radiographers on placement in radiotherapy who are supervised by trained staff.

What is treatment planning?

A period of planning or preparation is required before your treatment can start. This will involve an initial visit for a CT planning scan and then a gap of two to three weeks before your treatment starts, during which time doctors, physics staff and radiographers are preparing your treatment.

Planning CT Scanning

You will be given an appointment to attend the department's CT scanner to have your treatment planned. These are specialised CT scans, which are used to define the exact area to be treated and not for diagnosis. You will be carefully positioned by the radiographers for your scan and you will need to lie in the same position for you daily radiotherapy treatments.

You will be required to remove the clothing over your pelvis for your planning scan and subsequent treatment. Every effort will be made to keep you covered where possible. Gowns are available if you need one.

You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the radiographers will be watching you at all times. The staff may need to put some pen marks and markers on your skin to help plan your treatment. You can wash off the pen marks after this visit and the radiographers will remove the markers before you leave. After the scan, the radiographers will put small permanent marks on your skin (a tattoo), using ink and a needle. These marks are to show exactly where to position you for your treatment.

Contrast

Sometimes a contrast medium is used to help the radiographers, doctors and physics team to see organs more clearly on the CT scan. This can be given orally, injected into a vein or both. You will be told if you need contrast and given information about it. If you have had contrast before and had any kind of reaction to it please let your doctor or the radiographers know. This is normally only required for treatment planning and not whilst you are on daily radiotherapy.

Bowel and bladder preparation

You will need to have an empty rectum and a comfortably full bladder for your CT planning scan and for all your radiotherapy treatment appointments.

This can help to reduce the side effects to the bladder and rectum. In some cases we are able to check how empty the rectum is and how full the bladder using a CT scanner built into the treatment machine. If the bladder isn't full or the rectum isn't empty, or if there is excess gas/wind in the bowel, it may make treatment planning and the treatment itself more difficult. It may mean that we have to repeat your CT planning scan. Once you start treatment it may mean that you are asked to get off the treatment couch before having treatment to fill the bladder or empty the bowel sufficiently to ensure that the treatment is given accurately.

Full bladder preparation

To avoid becoming dehydrated it is important that you drink at least 2 litres of fluid throughout the day starting in the week before your CT planning scan and throughout treatment. The amount of fluid and time it takes to fill the bladder varies from one person to another. We suggest you try the following initially:-

- 1 hour before your appointment, empty your bladder
- Then drink 300ml of water (approximately 2 plastic cups from the water dispenser) straight away so that your bladder is comfortably full when it is time to treat you. It may be easier to get to the hospital early and do this whilst you are waiting.
- Do not urinate until your treatment appointment is completed (if you cannot hold your urine before your treatment, please inform the receptionist who will inform your radiographer)
- Keep an eye on the notice board in the waiting room for any delays on your treatment machine
- We appreciate that it can be difficult to hold your urine during these times. If you find it difficult holding your urine for 1 hour, we recommend that you practise the above instructions every day from receiving this information to your CT planning scan and subsequent treatments so that your bladder is trained for this technique.

If you have practised and found that you really cannot manage to hold your urine for an hour start with a length of time that you can manage, e.g. half an hour, empty your bladder every half hour whether you need to or not from when you get up in the morning until you go to bed, and then gradually try to increase the length of time that you hold your urine over the days or weeks until your appointment.

Cutting down on caffeine may also help with bladder control; try to reduce your intake of coffee, tea and cola. There are caffeine free alternatives available. You may find that you get a slight headache initially if you normally have a lot of caffeine.

Pelvic floor exercises may help to hold your urine for longer but it can take several weeks or months to notice an improvement.

Patient Information

Empty rectum preparation

You should have an empty rectum for your CT planning scan and every treatment.

Every day from receiving this information until your CT planning scan:-

- Ensure you are drinking 2-3 litres of fluid a day and eating well. This will help to keep your bowels regular
- Reduce green leafy vegetables to minimise wind
- Avoid other food or drink which you have noticed gives you wind

If you normally take laxatives then continue to do so. A good diet and fluid intake should help to keep your bowels regular, however, if you feel that you need to take laxatives in order to empty your bowel before your scan and treatment try a stimulant laxative such as Senna. Take these for one week before your planning scan and continue during your treatment unless your bowels become loose.

If you have excess gas in the bowel this will show on your CT planning scan and treatment scans. A dietary advice sheet is available on how to reduce excess wind.

Enemas

Your doctor or radiographer may have recommended micro-enemas to help you to have an empty rectum for your treatment. A micro-enema is a small enema, that is inserted into the rectum (back passage) daily about 2 hours before your CT planning scan and each daily treatment. The enema is usually effective within 30 minutes. Your doctor will discuss this with you if it is needed and give you a prescription.

Please contact us for further advice if you have any concerns about being able to attend with a full bladder and an empty rectum for your CT planning scan appointment on: Telephone: 024 7696 7493 or 024 7696 7290

Treatment

The radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. To do this they will ask you to remove any clothing from the treatment area. It is essential to make sure treatment is given safely and accurately, and you will be positioned on the treatment couch in the same way as when your treatment was planned.

The radiographers will line you up with the machine by dimming the room lights and using laser lights and a bright light from the machine. The machine may move around you during this process but in most cases will not touch you.

When you and the machine are in the correct position, the radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on. You will need to lie quite still but can breathe normally. You will not feel anything during the treatment but the machine will make a buzzing noise. Periodically it is necessary to take some images of the treatment area during your actual treatment. The treatment times are very short, but on days that this is done, you will be in the room a little longer. The radiographers will be watching you

Patient Information

throughout on closed circuit television cameras and can hear you on an intercom. They can switch the machine off and enter the room if you move or call them.

Once the machine has switched off there is no radiation present, you will not be radioactive and you are safe to be near pregnant women and children.

Female Pelvis

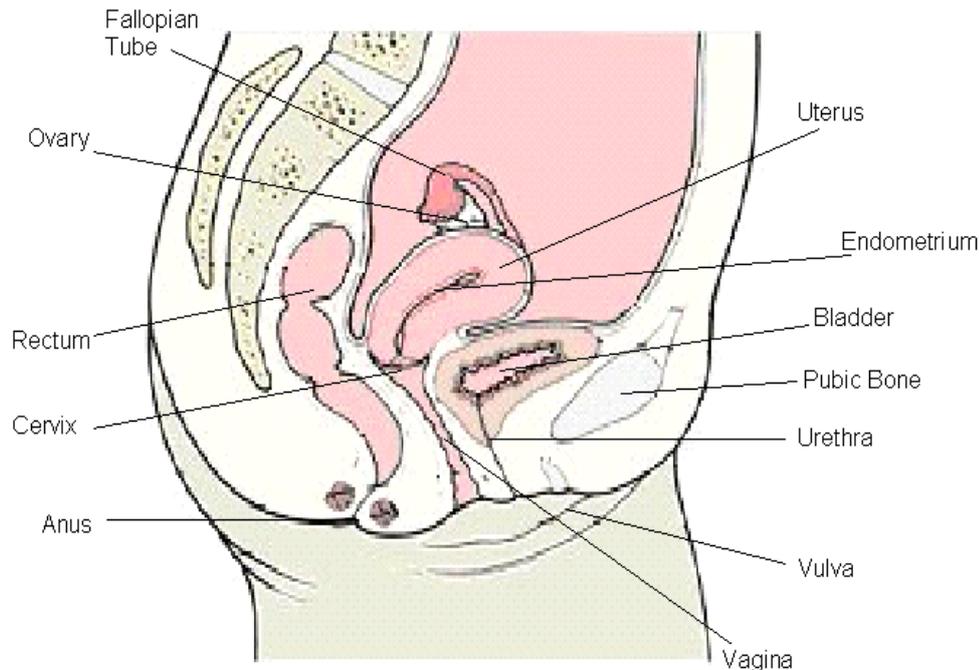


Diagram showing Uterus, Ovaries, Vagina and Cervix

Side effects of treatment

When treating female cancers in the pelvis, it is unavoidable to have to treat some healthy tissue such as the bladder and bowel. For this reason, radiotherapy can often have some unwanted side effects.

Research is going on all the time to make the treatment as effective as possible and to reduce the risk of these side effects. Side effects can be thought of as early (acute) and late (chronic) effects.

Early effects:

These effects occur during your treatment and for a few weeks after treatment has finished.

Effects on the bladder

- An increase in frequency of urination
- A burning sensation when passing urine
- Pain on passing urine

Patient Information

We advise you to:

Drink plenty of fluids, 2 - 3 litres a day

Avoid drinks that can irritate the bladder such as tea, green tea, coffee and alcohol.

Caffeine free alternatives are better but should still be drunk in moderation.

Drink plenty of water or squash.

Please tell the radiographers treating you if you think you may have urinary problems

Effects on the bowel:

- A bloated and tender feeling in your tummy
- An increase in the number of bowel movements
- Loose stools, urgency and diarrhoea
- Occasionally bleeding from the back passage

We advise you to:

Eat a normal well balanced diet; if your bowels are loose we may advise you of a change of diet or medication (loperamide hydrochloride). If required we can arrange for you to see a dietitian whilst you are attending for treatment.

Effects on the skin

- Radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction similar to exposure to the sun in the area treated
- Towards the end of treatment the skin may become red and / or dry and itchy
- sometimes moist patches may develop, particularly in your groins or any skin folds such as under your tummy

We advise that you:

- Bathe/shower daily using a mild soap or shower gel
- Do not have the water too hot or soak for too long
- Use a soft towel to pat yourself dry
- Avoid wearing tight clothes in the area being treated – cotton underwear is best
- A sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) free emollient cream should be used to soothe and moisturise the skin in the treatment area, especially skin folds. We do **not** recommend the use of any other creams. If you are unsure about which creams to use please ask one of the radiographers.
- Please tell the radiographers if your skin becomes sore.
- Do not use sun beds.
- **Don't swim if your skin is visibly red.** If you do swim, shower well before and after.

Other effects

- **Tiredness.** If you feel tired try to rest as much as you can. Research has found that gentle exercise such as a short daily walk may help the symptoms of tiredness and fatigue.
- **Nausea.** Let the radiographers know if this is a problem. It is possible to get a prescription for anti-sickness tablets. Eating light meals and drinking plenty of fluids can help.
- **Vaginal discharge.** Some people may experience a discharge from the front passage (vagina) which may be bloody. Please tell the radiographers treating you if this happens.
- **Hair loss** can occur in the treatment area, so you may lose some pubic hair. It will grow back but may be thinner.

Patient Information

- The treatment does **not** make you radioactive. It is safe to be near children and pregnant women.

Late effects

These may occur **months to years** after completion of treatment and may include:

- Vaginal dryness and narrowing - radiotherapy can cause a narrowing and shortening of the vagina, which may make sexual intercourse or pelvic examinations uncomfortable or difficult. It may also cause some dryness. You may be recommended to use a vaginal dilator and some lubricant jelly, which may help prevent this happening. These are used to maintain the opening of the vagina, and can help to make future clinical examinations more comfortable for you.
- Swollen legs - in some people, one or both of the legs can become swollen (lymphoedema). This is more likely to occur in women who have had both surgery and radiotherapy to the lymph nodes. Your doctor should be able to give you information about this and how it can be treated.
- Bladder changes - can include frequency, reduced bladder capacity, leakage and blood in the urine.
- Bowel changes - can include loose bowel motions, urgency, narrowing of the bowel and bleeding from the rectum.
- Radiotherapy will induce menopause in premenopausal women resulting in infertility. Please speak to your consultant for more information.
- There is a small risk of radiotherapy affecting the bones of the pelvis causing them to become weak, with the possibility of fine hair-line cracks developing called pelvic insufficiency fractures
- There is a very small risk (about 1-2% per 10 years follow-up) of a secondary cancer developing in the treatment area in the years following your radiotherapy.

Very rarely a bladder or bowel fistulae can develop. This condition arises when an abnormal opening forms between two organs that are not normally connected.

These long-term changes can be irreversible and MAY need investigation and management. Very rarely, if complications become sufficiently severe, surgical referral and intervention has to be considered. We would expect the risk of severe late effects, warranting surgery, to be less than 2% (i.e. 2 in 100 people). Risks will vary with the type of treatment and original extent of the cancer.

There is a booklet giving detailed information about potential side effects entitled "Managing the Late effects of Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women", which is produced by Macmillan Cancer Support. Please ask your doctor or radiographer if you would like a copy.

If you develop new symptoms after your treatment is over, or you are concerned that the immediate side effects are not clearing up, you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

There is often a simple explanation for these symptoms and they do not necessarily mean you will develop the late effects of treatment.

Patient Information

Treatment reviews

At some point during your treatment you may be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with either a review radiographer or a doctor. The aim of this review is to discuss any side effects that you may be experiencing as a result of your treatment, and any side effects that may occur as the treatment continues.

It is not usually possible to give you any information on how effective the treatment so far has been, at these review sessions for two reasons:

- Firstly, although we take pictures of the treatment area during your radiotherapy, they are to check the position of the treatment field and are not detailed enough to show us how well the treatment is working.
- Secondly, there is a delay in the way that radiotherapy works, so the effects of treatment can't be assessed until a number of weeks after the treatment has finished.

After treatment

The side effects from the treatment will continue for several weeks after the treatment course has been completed. After finishing your treatment you will receive an appointment to see your consultant approximately 6 to 8 weeks later to assess how well you are recovering from treatment and the response to treatment.

If you have any queries or concerns once your treatment has finished you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290 .If your call is urgent, please contact your own G.P. Please note the Arden Cancer Centre is open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 5:30pm.

Sexual relationships

Intercourse may not be possible for a few weeks following your treatment as your vagina will be inflamed. Some narrowing of the vagina can occur after radiotherapy, so it is beneficial to use the vaginal dilators that will be discussed with you, to make intercourse more comfortable. Using a lubricant jelly when intercourse resumes can ease vaginal dryness.

Counselling

There is a counselling service available at the Arden Centre, for more information speak to your specialist nurse, doctor or radiographer, or telephone 024 7696 7478.

Complementary Therapy

Aromatherapy, massage, Indian head massage, reiki, reflexology and yoga are available to cancer patients. Therapists are volunteers and provide their services to patients free of charge.

Complementary Therapies are by appointment only, please ask a member of staff, or telephone 024 7696 7290

Patient Information

Useful telephone numbers:

Reception, Arden Cancer Centre:, **024 7696 7272**

Mon – Fri 8.00am to 5.30pm

Radiotherapy Ward 35: **024 7696 5525 or 024 7696 5528 or 024 7696 5531**

Ask to speak to the Nurse in Charge – 24 hours

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist: **024 7696 7290**

Monday – Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm

Radiotherapy Planning: **024 7696 7493**

Further reading and information:

Arden Cancer Centre:

- Radiotherapy information for Patients having Intra-Uterine Brachytherapy (with Anaesthesia)
- Radiotherapy Information for Patients having Vaginal Vault Brachytherapy (post surgical)

NHS 111

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 00 00

www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research UK: 0300 123 1022

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust: 0808 802 8000

www.jostrust.org.uk

Information and Support

Macmillan Cancer Information Centre 024 7696 6052

We can offer free support, practical advice and information to anyone affected by cancer. No appointments are required and an answering machine facility is available. Open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm, the Centre is located on the ground floor of the main entrance.

You may find these information booklets useful:

Understanding Cancer of the:-

Cervix, Uterus, Ovary, Vulva and Vagina

Understanding Chemotherapy

Understanding Radiotherapy

Sexuality and Cancer

Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women – Managing side effects during treatment

Managing the Late effects of Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women

Patient Information

Patient satisfaction

We hope that you have found this booklet helpful.

We welcome your comments, on the care that you experience, and the service that we offer within the Arden Cancer Centre.

We ask that specific complaints be addressed to a member of staff so that, in line with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust complaints policy, they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Written by Alison Crichton & Julia Biggs (Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists)
With help and advice from the Medical Staff of the Arden Cancer Centre,
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, Coventry
CV2 2DX

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, we will do our best to meet your needs. Please contact Alison Crichton or Julia Biggs on 024 7696 7290.

This Trust operates a smoke free policy

Help to stop smoking can be obtained from your local NHS Stop Smoking Service:
0300 123 1044

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