

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Radiotherapy to the Oesophagus

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.

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy radiation, usually x-rays, 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.

Radiotherapy is delivered by highly trained staff called Therapy Radiographers on machines called Linear Accelerators. 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.

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 both your doctor and also the radiographers, before your first treatment.

Pregnancy

If you are, or become, pregnant at any time before or during your treatment it is



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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.

Smoking

It is strongly recommended that you stop smoking completely whilst undergoing radiotherapy. Smoking can make treatment side effects more severe, the treatment harder to tolerate and less effective. For help to stop smoking call the National smoke free Helpline on 0300 123 1044 or contact the hospital's stop smoking service 02476 964760.

Chemotherapy

Sometimes chemotherapy is given alongside your course of radiotherapy. You will be given specific written information and consented separately for this.

What is treatment planning?

Usually a period of planning or preparation is required before your treatment can start. This may involve an initial visit 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.

You will be required to remove your clothing over your chest for your planning visit and subsequent treatment. Only the part of your body that will be treated will be uncovered and every effort will be made to keep you covered where possible. Women having their chest area treated might like to wear a small crop top which can then be pulled down when required. Please ask if you are unsure.

Mould room

If you need treatment to the upper part of your oesophagus, you will be required to wear a mask over your head, neck and shoulders during your treatment. This mask is perforated so that you can see and breathe out of it. This will help you keep very still, and to make sure that you are in the same position daily each time you have your radiotherapy. You will probably have the mask made on your first visit; a separate information leaflet will be given to you about this.

Following this you will require a planning CT scan.

Planning CT scan

You will be given an appointment to attend the department's CT scanner to have your treatment planned. These CT scans, are used to define the exact area to be treated. It is very important to maintain the same position of your chest and arms for your daily treatment. You will be asked to lie on the couch and you may be supported by a moulded foam called a vac bag and arm supports during your planning scan and then subsequent treatments.

You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the radiographers will be watching you at all times through the window. 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

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this visit and the radiographers will remove the markers before you leave. After the scan, the radiographers will take some measurements and 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 and they are permanent.

Some patients will be asked to starve, that is to NOT eat or drink for 2 hours before your appointment. The radiographers will then ask you to drink 200mls of water about 30 minutes before the CT scan and subsequent treatments.

Every patient's treatment is individual and specifically planned. Your radiotherapy doctor will discuss with you the total number of treatments that you need and how often you will need to attend the department.

Contrast

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 only required for treatment planning and not whilst you are on daily radiotherapy.

How is the treatment given?

The radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. Your treatment is given with you in the same position as you were when your treatment was planned. You will be asked to lie on the treatment couch. The couch is then raised so it is closer to the machine. The radiographers use laser lights to line up your tattoos. The treatment machine comes close to you but does not touch you. The radiographers leave the room whilst the machine is switched on.

Treatment takes a few minutes and you need to remain as still as possible. In the unlikely event that you need to call a radiographer into the room, you can do so by calling out. The radiographers watch you all the time on a monitor outside the room.

Side effects of radiotherapy

Treatment is painless but can cause some side effects. Treatment affects people in different ways and it can be difficult to predict which side effects will affect you and how severe they will be.

Early side effects

These occur during your treatment and for a short while afterwards.

Effects on the skin

These are usually minimal for this type of treatment, however the following could occur:

- Radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction similar to exposure to the sun in the area treated
- Towards the end of treatment and during the first 1 or 2 weeks after treatment the skin may become red and itchy

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We advise that you:-

- Wash treated area daily with a mild soap or shower gel and pat your skin dry with a soft towel
- Moisturise the skin in the treatment area two or three times a day, at any time, with an emollient cream that is sodium lauryl sulphate free (no SLS). If you are unsure what to use please ask.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing next to the skin (cotton is a good natural fibre).
- Avoid any perfumes, aftershaves, or other creams in the treated area
- Avoid the use of sun lamps, spray tans or skin colouring lotions
- Avoid using hot water bottles or ice packs in the treatment area
- Keep the treated area out of the sun during treatment and care should be taken in the future by using a high factor sun cream – factor 30 or above

Tiredness: If you feel tired try to rest at regular intervals. Research has found that gentle exercise such as a short daily walk may help the symptoms of tiredness and fatigue.

Difficulty swallowing and indigestion: Food can become difficult to swallow and your oesophagus (food pipe) sore. This can last for a few weeks. You may be advised to have a feeding tube put into your stomach before treatment starts. Softer foods are easier to eat such as scrambled eggs, soups and stews. You may find it helpful to avoid hot or spicy foods and alcohol (particularly spirits). You will be referred to the oncology dietitian during your treatment for advice.

Loss of appetite: Some people find that radiotherapy treatment may change their sense of taste and that they lose their appetite during treatment. Eating little and often can help to maintain your weight.

Feeling sick: Radiotherapy can cause you to feel sick (nausea) and to be sick (vomiting). This can be treated with medication. You may also experience sickness immediately after swallowing food (regurgitation), please tell the radiographers if this happens.

Pain: If you experience aches and discomfort in your chest area, painkillers can help to make you feel more comfortable. Your radiotherapy doctor or radiographer will be able to give you more advice. You may find it helpful to take pain relief that is soluble (dissolves in water).

Hair loss: You may lose chest hair, the hair loss will only occur in the area being treated. This hair loss can be temporary however in some cases this may be permanent. Your consultant or a member of the team will be able to discuss this with you.

Blood tests: If you are having chemotherapy at the same time as your radiotherapy, you will need to have weekly blood tests.

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The side effects of the treatment will start to ease off usually within two to four weeks of the treatment finishing. The full benefit of the treatment is not usually reached until some weeks after the last treatment session.

Late Side Effects

Long term side effects can occur many months to years after you have completed your treatment. These side effects are hard to predict and if they occur can be permanent. We plan the treatment to avoid the surrounding areas around the tumour as much as possible in order to reduce these effects.

Breathlessness

Radiation can cause inflammation (radiation pneumonitis) and scarring (fibrosis) of the lung. This can occur two to three months after finishing treatment.

Narrowing of your food pipe (oesophagus)

Narrowing of the food pipe is called a stricture, which can cause difficulty swallowing. The stricture can be relieved by a small endoscopic procedure to stretch the narrowing and allow food to pass through easily again.

Spinal cord damage:

This is extremely rare but radiotherapy near the spinal cord carries a risk of nerve damage. Your consultant will discuss this with you if it is relevant.

Heart damage:

Occasionally, radiotherapy to the chest can cause inflammation of the lining surrounding the heart (pericarditis) or some weakening of the heart muscle (myopathy) resulting in chest pain and shortness of breath. This is rare and may require further investigation and treatment.

There is a small risk (1-2% per 10 years following treatment) of developing a second cancer due to radiotherapy.

Please discuss any new symptoms that you experience after your treatment, with your consultant in the follow up clinic.

If you are concerned about the late effects of radiotherapy treatment, or would like more information, please speak to your Consultant, a member of the medical team or the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

Treatment reviews

At some point during your treatment you will be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with a therapy radiographer, a consultant, specialist nurse or another member of the team. 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 has been so far at these review sessions for two reasons:

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- Firstly, although we take images 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 to months after the treatment has finished.

After treatment

The early side effects from the treatment will continue for several weeks to months after the treatment course has been completed.

After finishing treatment, you will receive an appointment to see your consultant . If you haven't received this within 3 weeks of completing treatment please telephone radiotherapy reception on 024 7696 7272.

If you have any problems concerning your radiotherapy treatment you can contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist on 024 7696 7290.

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.

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.

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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)

Thames Ambulance Service – patients with a Leicester GP
0345 241 3012

NSL – for patients with a Northamptonshire GP
0843 208 6888

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.

Travel costs

The NHS Hospital Travel Cost Scheme enables people in receipt of certain benefits or who are on a low income to claim back some of their travel costs. Please ask to speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist for more information.

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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.

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, reiki, massage, reflexology and yoga are available to oncology 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

The Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist is available in the department to help you with any queries concerning the above. Please ask at the reception desk.

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 in the main entrance.

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Useful telephone numbers:

Arden Cancer Centre – Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

For queries concerning appointments, parking and ambulance transport
Radiotherapy reception: 024 7696 7272

Oncology Ward 35: 024 7696 5525 or 024 7696 5528 or 024 7696 5531
(24 hour emergency advice only please)

Cancer and Radiotherapy Information and advice: 024 7696 7290
Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

NHS advice - use the 111 service

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 00 00

www.macmillan.org.uk

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's complaints policy, they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Further Information

If you need help, information or advice, either during, or at any time after your course of treatment has finished, please telephone: 024 7696 7290, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm and speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

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With help and advice from the medical staff of the Arden Cancer Centre,
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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.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy. Please respect other patients and staff and refrain from smoking whilst visiting the hospital.

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