

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Treatment for Colorectal / Anal 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.

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, although some superficial skin treatments are given on smaller machines.

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.



Patient Information

Pacemakers

If you have a pacemaker please mention this both to 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 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.

It is usually necessary to have weekly blood tests when on chemotherapy and radiotherapy together, if you have not been advised about this please ask.

Treatment planning

In order to treat you accurately and reduce side effects, your radiotherapy treatment must be carefully planned. This will involve having a CT scan in the radiotherapy department.

These are specialised CT scans, which are used to define the exact area to be treated. We may give you special instructions to prepare for your scan.

You may be required to remove some of your clothing 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. Please ask if you are unsure.

CT scan Preparation

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

You may also be required to have a full bladder for your CT scan and subsequent treatments. The radiographers will discuss this with you if needed.

Patient Information

You should try to keep your bowels open regularly and avoid being constipated. Drinking 2- 3 litres of fluid a day will help, continue with laxatives if you are using them already.

If you need a full bladder for your CT scan, we recommend that you arrive in the department one hour before your appointment. Then empty your bladder and afterwards drink 300mls of water straight away. It helps if you have had a good fluid intake on the day of your appointment to avoid being dehydrated.

Following your CT planning scan there will be a gap of 3-4 weeks before your treatment starts, during which time doctors, physics staff and radiographers are preparing your treatment.

Skin marks

At the scan felt tip pen marks will be put onto your skin; these reference marks are used to identify the area that will be treated. In most cases, with your permission, we can put tiny permanent dots of dye just beneath the skin, which will not wash off, called tattoos.

Treatment

The radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. To do this you will need to fill your bladder in the same way you did for your CT planning scan. The radiographers will ask you to remove any clothing from the treatment area 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 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. The radiographers will be watching you 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 are safe to be near pregnant women and children.

What are the side effects of treatment?

Treatment is painless but can cause some side effects. It is unlikely that you will experience all of the side effects listed below, 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.

Side effects can be thought of as early (acute) and late (chronic)

Patient Information

Early Side Effects

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

Effects on the bowel

- Cramping pains in your tummy(abdomen) or back passage (rectum)
- A bloated and tender feeling in your tummy
- Needing to empty your bowel (poo) urgently
- Loose stools (poo), possibly diarrhoea and some mucous
- Passing a lot of wind
- Occasionally passing mucous or blood when you empty your bowels
- Some leakage from your rectum

Advice

- Try to eat your usual diet and avoid missing meals. If you are struggling to eat or losing weight we can arrange for a dietitian to see you
- Drink plenty of fluids, aim for 2-3 litres per day
- If necessary we will advise you on medication to help control diarrhoea
- Avoid foods and drinks that give you wind, such as pickles, beans, curries and fizzy drinks
- If you smoke, try to stop. Smoking can make side effects worse

Effects on the bladder (cystitis)

- Passing urine (peeing) more often than usual
- A burning sensation or pain when passing urine
- Passing urine during the night
- Feeling that you can't wait when you need to pass urine
- Blood in your urine
- Leaking small amounts of urine

Advice

- Drink plenty of fluids, 2 - 3 litres a day – keep your urine light in colour
- Avoid drinks that can irritate the bladder such as tea, green tea, coffee, alcohol, cola and fizzy drinks, citrus fruits and drinks with artificial sweetener
- It is ok to drink water, squash, herb / fruit tea or caffeine-free drinks

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

Effects on the skin

- Radiotherapy causes 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
- Patients receiving treatment to the lower rectum / anus will get a more severe skin reaction, moist patches may develop and you may need to have dressings applied.

Patient Information

You may also need to take painkillers for a while towards the end of treatment and for three to four weeks after.

We advise that you:-

- Wash the treated area daily with a mild soap 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 which 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 the use of sun lamps, spray tans or skin colouring lotions
- Avoid using hot water bottles or ice packs in the treatment area
- You may continue to swim if your skin is not visibly red, providing that you wash the treatment area before and afterwards

If the skin becomes very sore or broken you will be seen by the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist or Tissue Viability Assistant Practitioner who can provide creams and dressings as required.

Other effects

Tiredness

- Most people will feel tired as a result of having radiotherapy. Tiredness will often come on gradually as the treatment progresses and may persist for some weeks after the treatment has finished.
- If you feel tired you may need to sleep or rest. However, if you are feeling up to it, regular exercise such as taking a short walk can help with 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.

Hair loss

This can occur in the treatment area, so you may lose some pubic hair.

Weight loss

Sometimes people can lose weight during their treatment. This can be due to side effects such as diarrhoea, nausea and tiredness which can affect appetite. If you are not eating enough it may take longer to recover and heal, and you may feel more tired and weak. Weight loss can also affect the way that we give your treatment, so we may monitor your weight and If you are struggling to eat and your weight is dropping we can refer you to a Dietitian.

Patient Information

Late effects

These may occur months to years after completion of treatment.

Bowel changes can include loose bowel motions, mucous discharge, a change in consistency of stools, urgency, narrowing of the bowel and bleeding from the rectum and some problems controlling bowel movements which, in a small number of people, can result in the need for a stoma.

Bladder changes can include frequency, urgency and reduced bladder capacity, difficulty passing urine, straining to release urine, repeat urinary infections and very occasionally leakage and blood in the urine.

Bone pain – rarely long term side effects can include some weakness in the bones in the pelvis causing pain.

Changes in bone density – can occur in women as a result of a premature menopause. Weight bearing exercise and a calcium enriched diet may help to prevent this. It may be necessary to have a bone density scan.

Changes to sexual function

In women, radiotherapy can cause a narrowing and shortening of the vagina, which may make sexual intercourse and clinical examinations uncomfortable or difficult. You may be recommended to use a vaginal dilator and some lubricant jelly, which could help prevent this happening. Radiotherapy may also cause some vaginal dryness for which lubricants are available on prescription. This will be discussed with you during your radiotherapy.

In men, the ability to get an erection may be affected due to the effect of radiotherapy on the nerves and blood vessels that supply the penis. Men may also experience a loss of libido. Your doctor will be able to advise you about treatments that can help with these side effects.

Fertility

Your consultant should have discussed with you the effects of your radiotherapy treatment on fertility.

In young women with functioning ovaries, radiation treatment to the pelvis can result in infertility. This is because the treatment brings about a premature menopause.

Infertility can also occur in men having treatment for anal cancer as the scrotum may be affected by the treatment.

When infertility does occur it is often not immediate and you will need to use contraception during and after treatment (your doctor will give you advice about this).

There are booklets giving detailed information about potential side effects available from Macmillan Cancer Support. Please speak to your doctor if you are concerned about long term side effects.

Patient Information

Risk of developing a second cancer

There is a small risk (1-2%) of developing a second cancer in the area treated 10 years after treatment.

Treatment Reviews

Every week during your treatment you will 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 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 after the treatment has finished.

After treatment:

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

After finishing treatment, you will receive an appointment to see your consultant between 4-8 weeks later. If you haven't received this within three weeks of completing treatment please telephone radiotherapy reception on 024 7696 7272.

If you have any problems before then, you can contact the **Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists** 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

Patient Information

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.

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,

Patient Information

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.

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.

Patient Information

Complementary therapy

Aromatherapy, reiki, massage, Indian head massage, reflexology and yoga are available to oncology patients. Our 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.

Useful information

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, next to the reception desk.

Useful telephone numbers:

Arden Cancer Centre: Monday to Friday 8am – 5:30pm

Radiotherapy reception: 024 7696 7272

Planning Radiographers: 024 7696 7493

Radiotherapy Information and advice: 024 7696 7290

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist
Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

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

NHS advice: use the 111 service

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 0000

www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research UK:

www.cancerresearchuk.org

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.

Patient Information

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 Julia Biggs & Alison Crichton (Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists)
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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.

This Trust operates a smoke free policy

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

Document History

Author	Julia Biggs and Alison Crichton
Department	Radiotherapy
Contact Tel No	27290
Published	January 2008
Reviewed	May 2019
Review	May 2020
Version	9
Reference No	HIC/LFT/622/08