

## Arden Cancer Centre

# Radiotherapy: General Information for Patients Receiving Treatment

### What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells in the area being treated. Radiotherapy can also change normal cells in the treatment area which can cause some side effects. However, radiotherapy is planned very carefully to protect as much healthy tissue as possible to reduce these side effects. The tissues usually heal, with an improvement in side effects and symptoms over time.

Radiotherapy is delivered by highly trained staff called Therapeutic 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.

For more information about radiotherapy and to watch our department video go to the trust website and search for radiotherapy or use the following link: <https://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/our-services-and-people/our-departments/radiotherapy/>

### Consent forms

Before you have 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 and that you agree to go ahead with treatment.



### **Pacemakers**

**If you have a pacemaker or implantable defibrillator, please mention this to both your doctor and the radiographers, before your first treatment. The performance of your device can be altered by the treatment and may need testing before and after treatment is given.**

### **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.

### **What is treatment planning / CT planning?**

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.

There may then be a gap of 3 to 4 weeks before your treatment starts, during which time doctors, physics staff and radiographers are preparing your treatment.

You may be required to remove some of your clothing for your CT scan 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 who are having the chest treated might like to wear a small crop top which can then be pulled down when required. Please ask if you are unsure.

## Patient Information

Some patients with tumours near the neck may also be required to have a plastic face and neck mask made which you wear during treatment. This helps to keep your head and neck still so that we don't have to put pen marks on your neck. You will need to wear the mask for the CT scan and subsequent treatment. There is a separate booklet describing how the mask is made. Please ask for more information if this applies to you.

### Contrast

Sometimes a contrast medium is used to help the radiographers, doctors, and physics team see your 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.

### Skin marks

At the CT scan, you will have felt tip pen marks put onto your skin which are used as a reference for the planning process and during treatment. With your permission, we can put tiny permanent dots of dye just beneath the skin, which will not wash off, called a tattoo. If we are unable to do this, you will need to keep felt tip pen marks on your skin for all your treatment. The radiographers may take a digital photograph of the area being treated for reference.

### Treatment

The radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. 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 dim the lights and use laser lights to line up your tattoos. When you and the treatment machine are in the correct position the radiographers leave the room to switch the machine on. You will need to lie quite still but can breathe normally. The treatment machine will move around you during the treatment, but nothing will touch you. You will not feel anything during the treatment, but the machine will make a buzzing noise.

## Patient Information

The treatment times are very short. Images are taken beforehand to check that the treatment is correct before it is given. The radiographers watch you throughout on a monitor and will turn the machine off and enter the room if you move or call for assistance. Most people will be in the treatment room for about 15-20mins.

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.

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.

### **Radiotherapy Side Effects**

Treatment is painless but can cause some short and long term side effects. Side effects are specific to the area treated and the dose received and should have been discussed with you when you consented for your treatment.

**Short term, or early, side effects generally occur about 7-10 days after treatment has started and may last for a few weeks afterwards.**

**Most of the side effects described below will be short term. However, some side effects can persist, and some can occur months or years after completion of treatment, these are known as long term or late effects and can have an impact on quality of life.**

If you want any further information or are concerned about these side effects, please ask to speak to your consultant or the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

### **Will the treatment make my hair fall out?**

Radiotherapy only causes hair loss from your head when your scalp or back of your neck is treated. If hair loss is a possibility for you this will be discussed with you beforehand. You can continue to wash and dry your hair normally, unless specifically asked not to. Hair loss from other areas of your body can occur if these are within the area treated, such as underarm hair, pubic hair, or chest hair. At higher treatment doses hair loss can be permanent.

## Patient Information

### **Will it make me radioactive?**

No. Radiation is only present while the machine is treating. Your treatment will not affect anyone else, and you can continue mixing with people normally.

### **Will I be sick?**

For most people this is unlikely, but it does depend upon the area of body treated. If you experience nausea, please mention this to the radiotherapy staff so that medication can be prescribed.

### **How will it affect my skin?**

Most people will not get a skin reaction, but this depends on your skin type and on the treatment prescribed for you. In general terms, your skin over the treatment area might become sore and itchy. For people with lighter skin tones the skin may appear pink or red, for those with darker skin tones the skin may appear darker. Rarely moist patches may develop.

During treatment and for 2-3 weeks after, or until any skin reaction has settled, advise that you:

- Wash the treated area daily with your usual soap or shower gel and pat your skin dry with a soft towel.
- Apply your usual skin moisturiser on the treatment area two or three times a day. Gently smooth it onto your skin until it is absorbed. Do not apply just before your treatment.
- If you need to, ask your GP to prescribe a suitable skin moisturiser, otherwise discuss this with your treatment radiographers at the start of your radiotherapy.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing next to the skin (cotton is a good natural fibre).
- Avoid any perfumes, aftershaves, make-up, hair dye 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 50.

## Patient Information

- Avoid shaving in the area being treated (if you must shave then use an electric razor for dry shaving only. If the skin becomes visibly red, stop shaving). No wet shaving, hair removal creams, lasers or wax should be used.
- Avoid using sticky tape in the treatment area such as Elastoplast or Micropore.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

### Swimming

You may continue to swim if your skin is not blistered or peeling, providing that you wash the treatment area before and afterwards and apply moisturiser. Care should be taken as chlorinated water can have a drying effect on the skin. Do not swim if you have an infection or your skin is irritated.

### What other side effects might I experience?

The most common side effect is a feeling of increased tiredness, this can persist after treatment has finished. Sometimes light exercise can help with fatigue but if you get very tired, please try to have extra rest and drink plenty of fluids.

Side effects depend on which area of the body is treated. The side effects described above are general to most radiotherapy patients. Some side effects appear only if specific areas of the body are treated. The next section describes these.

If you are on regular pain medication continue taking this until advised otherwise. If you experience any discomfort following treatment simple pain relief medication such as paracetamol can help. Please let your treatment team, nurse specialist or doctor know if your pain is troublesome.

### Treatment to the abdomen, pelvis, or lumber-sacral spine

If your abdomen, pelvis, or lumber-sacral spine (lower back) is in the treatment area, your bowels may be irritated and you may experience a change in bowel habit, loose stools, or diarrhoea, and occasionally nausea and sickness.

If your bladder is in the treatment area you may also experience urinary frequency and cystitis symptoms.

## Patient Information

We advise that you:

- Drink plenty of fluids especially water or diluted squash.
- Eat a normal diet, unless advised otherwise.
- Try to cut down on caffeinated tea and coffee, fizzy drinks and avoid alcohol.

For these side effects medication can be prescribed to help, such as anti-sickness or anti-diarrhoea tablets.

Radiotherapy to the abdomen or pelvis can also affect fertility and sexual function; your consultant will discuss this with you.

### **Treatment to the chest or thoracic spine**

If your chest or thoracic spine (upper/mid-back) is in the treatment area, you may experience the sensation of having a lump in your throat when swallowing or of indigestion, or heartburn. This is caused by the radiotherapy and should disappear within a few weeks of the treatment finishing. This can be quite painful, and soluble pain medication or an antacid liquid may help.

We recommend that you eat softer foods which can be swallowed more easily e.g., by adding extra sauce, mashing, or blending. Supplement drinks may be prescribed by your GP. If needed, there is an oncology Dietitian available who can advise you about your diet and nutrition whilst attending for treatment.

If you have a cough when you start your treatment, you may find that this becomes slightly more troublesome in the short term, due to the radiation effect. Simple cough linctus may help, or pain medication could be prescribed to help you. Please ask if you have need of this.

A few patients having their chest treated find that, due to their disease, they are very short of breath and may need advice about how to cope with this.

Some patients may experience chest hair loss from the treated area, occurring about three weeks after their first treatment.

## Patient Information

### Treatment to the mouth or neck or cervical spine

If your mouth, neck, or cervical spine is included in the treatment area you may experience a sore throat and difficulty swallowing. We advise that you:

- Keep your mouth and throat moist with regular sips of water.
- Avoid drinks that dry your mouth such as alcohol.
- Do not use a commercial mouthwash as they may contain alcohol which will dry and irritate your mouth - mouthwash can be prescribed for you.
- Use a **salt-water mouthwash** to help keep your mouth clean. Mix half a teaspoon of salt in a pint of lukewarm water, rinse around your mouth, gargle and spit out.
- Avoid food that is rough, hard, or sharp and very spicy, salty or acidic tasting food as it can irritate your mouth or throat.
- Avoid very hot or cold temperatures of food and drink.
- Modify the texture of your food by adding extra sauce, mashing, or blending.
- Supplement drinks may be prescribed.

### Short courses of radiotherapy

Sometimes your radiotherapy consultant will decide that the best method of treatment for you is either one single treatment, or a short course of 5 or less treatments. Side effects for each area are listed above.

When treatment is given in this way, most side effects occur about 7 days after your first treatment and not during the treatment itself. If you experience problems, please contact the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists on 024 7696 7290 or your Macmillan Cancer Nurse Specialist.

Sometimes a single dose of radiotherapy can make you feel unwell later in the day or night.

If you experience problems out of hours following treatment, either contact your own GP, NHS 111 or Acute Oncology at University Hospital, Coventry: 024 7696 4000 and ask for Acute oncology bleep 1641.

### Treatment reviews

At some point during your treatment, you may be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with a review radiographer, a doctor, or a specialist nurse. The aim of this review is to discuss any side effects that you may be experiencing because 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 some 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 6-12 weeks later. At this appointment any further treatment or investigations will be discussed with you.

If you haven't received an appointment within three weeks of completing treatment, please telephone your doctor's secretary.

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 part of university Hospital Coventry. The entrance to the Arden Centre is situated to the left of the main Hospital entrance. Please visit the University Hospital web site for up-to-date maps and directions: [www.uhcw.nhs.uk](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk).

## Patient Information

### 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.

**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.**

#### 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](http://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:

## Patient Information

### **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**

0300 0110017

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 time. We advise that, where possible, patients make their own travel arrangements. If you must 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 from which is open from 10am to 4pm.

### **Transport Schemes**

There are volunteer 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

### 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.
- On the first day of treatment, you will be given a written appointment schedule. Please check these dates and notify your treatment radiographers as soon as possible if you need to change any dates or times.
- Every effort will be made to give you times that you prefer but this cannot be guaranteed.
- 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.
- There may be breaks in treatment due to public holidays and machine maintenance. These 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.
- It is important that we have a contact telephone number for you as we may 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 another telephone number.

## Patient Information

### **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.

### **Smoking**

It is strongly recommended that you **stop smoking** completely whilst undergoing radiotherapy. Smoking makes treatment side effects more severe and the treatment harder to tolerate and less effective. For help to stop smoking contact the hospital's stop smoking service 0800 122 3780 or 07377 558478.

### **Information and Support**

**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.

### **Useful Telephone Numbers**

**Arden Cancer Centre:** 024 7696 7272

Monday to Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

**Radiotherapy Planning:** 024 7696 7493

Monday – Friday 9:00am to 5.00pm

**Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists:** 024 7696 7290

Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

**Acute Oncology** (evenings and weekends)

UHCW switchboard: 024 7696 4000 Ask to bleep acute oncology on 1641

**NHS advice** – use the **111** service

**Macmillan Cancer Support:** 0808 808 00 00 [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

## Patient Information

### Patient Satisfaction

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.

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 9.00am to 5.00pm and speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 02476967272 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

### Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:  
[www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback)



#### Document History

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