

Patient Information

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Radiotherapy to the Oesophagus

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells in the area being treated. Radiotherapy can also damage 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 in order 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:-

<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.



Patient Information

Pacemakers

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

Smoking

It is strongly recommended that you stop smoking completely whilst undergoing radiotherapy. Smoking can make treatment side effects more severe and the treatment 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. 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?

A period of planning or preparation is required before your treatment can start. This is to allow accurate "aiming" of the radiotherapy at your tumour and calculation of how to deliver the correct dose of radiation to it.

CT Planning scan

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 and then a gap of three to four weeks before

Patient Information

your treatment starts, during which time doctors, physics staff and radiographers are planning your treatment.

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. This will apply for the CT scan and subsequent treatments.

For the CT scan and subsequent treatment, you will be required to remove your clothing over your chest. 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 might like to wear a small crop top which can then be pulled down when required. Please ask if you are not sure.

It is very important to maintain the same position of your chest and arms for your CT scan and daily treatment. You will be asked to lie on your back, you may be supported by moulded foam (called a vac bag) and arm supports during your planning scan and then subsequent treatments.

If you need treatment to the upper part of your oesophagus, you may be required to wear a mask over your head, neck and shoulders for your CT scan and 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 have the mask made just before you have your CT scan; a separate information leaflet will be given to you about this.

Skin Marks

At the scan, felt tip pen marks will be put on to your skin; these marks are used as 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 tattoos. If we are unable to do this you will need to keep felt tip pen marks on your skin for all of your treatment.

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

Patient Information

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 by mouth, 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.

Treatment

Radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. You will be asked 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 dim the lights use laser lights to line up your tattoos. 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. The treatment machine will move around you during treatment but nothing will touch you. You will not feel anything during the treatment but the machine will make a buzzing noise.

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 all of the time on a monitor and will switch 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.

Patient Information

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.

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

Early side effects

These occur during your treatment and for a few weeks 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.

We advise that you:-

- Wash treated area daily with your usual soap or shower gel and pat your skin dry with a soft towel.
- Apply your usual moisturiser to the skin in the treatment area two or three times a day, gently smooth it onto your skin until it is absorbed. Do not apply just before 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. They may be able to give you a sample moisturiser to try.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing next to the skin (cotton is a good natural fibre).
- Avoid shaving in the area being treated (if you have to shave then use an electric razor for dry shaving only. When the skin becomes visibly red, stop shaving). No wet shaving, hair removal creams, lasers or wax should be used.
- Avoid any perfumes, aftershaves, or other creams in the treated area.

Patient Information

- 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.
- 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.

Tiredness:

- Most people will feel tired as a result of having radiotherapy. Tiredness will often come on slowly as the treatment progresses and may continue 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.

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.

Cough:

- You might experience a slight cough which can be irritating. A simple cough linctus may help with the irritation and drink plenty of fluids.

Patient Information

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, please tell the radiographers.
- Pain killers 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 happen 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.

Late Side Effects

These may occur months to years after completion of 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.

Patient Information

Breathlessness

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

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 review radiographer, a doctor, a specialist nurse or another member of the team. You will also be seen weekly by a dietitian. 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.

Patient Information

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:

- 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 three weeks of completing treatment please telephone your consultant's secretary.

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 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.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

Patient Information

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 **see the transport for West Midlands website: <https://www.tfwm.org.uk>.**

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.

Patient Information

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

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 considerable time. We advise that, where possible, patients make their own travel arrangements. If you have to rely on the hospital transport service, please make sure 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 allows people in receipt of certain benefits or who are on a low income to claim back some of their travel

Patient Information

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 if you need to change any dates or times as soon as possible.
- Every effort will be made to give you times that you prefer, but with a heavy workload 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. 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 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.

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.

Complementary therapy - maybe unavailable due to COVID19 restrictions

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.

Useful telephone numbers:

Arden Cancer Centre: 024 7696 7272

Mon – Fri 9.00am to 5.00pm

Radiotherapy Ward 35: 024 7696 5528

Ask to speak to the Nurse in Charge – 24 hours

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist: 024 7696 7290

Monday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

Radiotherapy Planning: 024 7696 7493

Information and Support

Cancer Information Centre 024 7696 6052

Patient Information

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, next to the reception desk.

NHS advice - use the 111 service

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 00 00

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.

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 9.00am to 5:00pm and speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

Written by Julia Biggs & Alison Crichton (Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists)

With help and advice from the medical staff of the Arden Cancer Centre, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust, Coventry CV2 2DX

Patient Information

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.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

Document History

Department:	Oncology
Contact:	27290
Updated:	February 2022
Review:	February 2023
Version:	3
Q-pulse:	V5
Reference:	HIC/LFT/2335/18