

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy Information for Patients Undergoing Treatment for Colorectal / Anal Cancer

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 shield 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 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 and that you agree to go



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ahead with treatment.

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.

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 the radiographers.

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

For the CT scan and subsequent treatment, you will be required to remove the clothing over your pelvis. Every effort will be made to keep you covered where possible. Gowns are available if you need one. You will be carefully positioned on the CT couch by the radiographers, lying on your back with

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sponges under your head, knees and feet for support. This is the same position that you will be in everyday for your radiotherapy treatments.

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.

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 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.

Bowel and bladder preparation

For your CT scan and all of your radiotherapy appointments you should try to open your bowels daily and avoid being constipated, continue with laxatives if you are using them already.

Drinking at least 2 litres (4pints) of fluid a day will help to keep you hydrated and to keep your bowels regular. You will need to have a full bladder for your CT scan and all of your radiotherapy appointments.

Bladder preparation:

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 or half a pint) straight away so that your bladder is comfortably full when it is time to treat you.

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- 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).
- Check 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.

Cutting down on caffeine may 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.

Treatment

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. Remember to keep your bowels moving daily.

The radiographers will dim the lights and 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 the time on a monitor and will turn the machine off and enter the

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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.

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)

Early Side Effects

These early side effects occur during your treatment and will last for a few weeks after radiotherapy has finished.

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.

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- Drink plenty of fluids, aim for at least 2 litres (4 pints) 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.
- Stinging when passing urine.
- Passing urine during the night.
- Feeling that you can't wait when you need to pass urine (urgency).
- Blood in your urine.
- Leaking small amounts of urine.

Advice

- Drink well, aim for at least 2 litres (4 pints) a day – keep your urine light in colour.
- Avoid drinks that can irritate the bladder such as tea, green tea, coffee, alcohol, cola, fruit juices, fizzy drinks, and drinks with artificial sweetener, avoid eating citrus fruits.
- 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. You may also need to take painkillers for a while towards the end of treatment and for three to four weeks after.

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We advise that you:-

- Wash the treated area daily with your usual soap 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 the use of sun lamps, spray tans or skin colouring lotions.
- Avoid using hot water bottles or ice packs in the treatment area.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

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- 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, if you are struggling to eat and your weight is dropping we can refer you to a dietitian.

Late side 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 or anal canal 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 – 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.

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

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If you are concerned about the late effects of radiotherapy treatment, or would like more information, please speak to your consultant, your colorectal specialist nurse, or the Macmillan radiotherapy specialist.

There are booklets giving detailed information about potential side effects available from Macmillan Cancer Support.

Treatment Reviews

Every week during your treatment you will be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with a review radiographer, a doctor, or your colorectal specialist nurse. 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.

At your reviews it is not usually possible to give you any information on how well the treatment is working, there are two reasons for this:

- 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 6-8 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 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 points outside the Arden Centre and near the main 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.

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>.**

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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:

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 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

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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. 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.

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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.

Useful telephone numbers:

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

Monday– Friday 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

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.

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 0000

www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research UK:

www.cancerresearchuk.org

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NHS advice: use the 111 service

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 Julia Biggs & Alison Crichton (Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists)
With help and advice from the Medical Staff of the Arden Cancer Centre,
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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 or the hospital 024 7696 4760.

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

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