

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 treatment area. Radiotherapy can also damage normal cells in the treatment area. This can cause some side effects.

We plan radiotherapy very carefully to protect as much healthy tissue as possible and reduce these side effects. The tissues usually heal with side effects and symptoms improving over time.

Radiotherapy is delivered by highly trained staff called Therapeutic radiographers. It is delivered on machines called linear accelerators.

Both male and female staff will treat you. We are a teaching hospital and have student radiographers on placement, 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/>



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Consent forms

Before you have this procedure, you will need to sign a consent form. This indicates that:

- your doctor has explained the treatment procedure and any possible side effects to you, and
- you agree to go ahead with treatment.

Pacemakers

If you have a pacemaker or implantable defibrillator, please tell your doctor and the radiographers before your first treatment. Treatment can alter the performance of your device. It may need testing before and after treatment is given.

Pregnancy

Tell a member of staff as soon as possible if you are pregnant or become pregnant at any time before or during your treatment. 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 harder to tolerate and less effective.

For help to stop smoking contact the hospital's stop smoking service: 024 7696 4760 or call the Smokefree national helpline on 0300 123 1044.

Chemotherapy

Your doctor may also prescribe chemotherapy to be given during your course of radiotherapy. You'll receive specific written information and give your consent for this separately. You usually need to have weekly blood

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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 the treatment area
- calculation of how to deliver the correct dose of radiation to the treatment area.

CT Planning scan

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.

Depending on which part of the oesophagus we are treating, you may be asked to fast before the CT scan and each treatment. This will involve:

- having nothing to eat or drink for 2 hours before your appointment
- the radiographers will then ask you to drink 200mls of water about 30 minutes before your scan. You will be advised about this when you attend the appointment
- **if you have not been advised to fast you can eat and drink as normal.**

For the CT scan and later treatment, you'll need to remove your clothing from your chest. We'll make every effort to keep you covered where possible. You might like to wear a small crop top which can be pulled down when needed. Please ask if you are not sure.

It is very important that your chest and arms are in the same position for your CT scan and later treatments. 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 treatments.

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If you need treatment to the **upper part of your oesophagus**, you may need to wear a plastic mask over your head, neck and shoulders. You will have the mask made in the Arden Centre just before you have your CT scan. A separate information leaflet will be given to you about this.

You will need to wear the mask for your CT scan and later treatments. The 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.

If you need to have a plastic mask and you have a beard, we recommend that you have this shaved before you attend your appointment. You may need to remove some clothing from around your neck for the mask to be made and whilst wearing it.

After the CT appointment there will be a gap of 3 to 4 weeks before your treatment starts. During this time, doctors, physics staff and radiographers are preparing your treatment.

Skin Marks

At the CT scan, you will have felt tip pen marks put onto your skin. These are used as reference for the planning process and during treatment. With your permission, we can put tiny permanent dots of dye beneath the skin called tattoos. These will not wash off. If we cannot do this, you will need to keep felt tip pen marks on your skin for all of your treatment.

Contrast

Sometimes an intravenous contrast medium is used. This helps 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've had contrast before and had any reaction to it, please let your doctor, or the radiographers know. Contrast is only needed for treatment planning and not for daily radiotherapy.

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Treatment

You will need to prepare for your treatment in the same way as your CT scan. If you have been advised to fast you must:

- have nothing to eat or drink for 2 hours before your treatment
- the radiographers will give you further advice about when to drink your water.

If you have not been advised to fast you can eat and drink as normal.

The radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. You will need to remove the clothing from the treatment area. You will then lie in the same position you were in when you had your CT planning scan.

The radiographers will dim the lights and use laser lights to line up your tattoos. Once you and the treatment machine are in the correct position, the radiographers leave the room to switch the machine on. You need to lie quite still but can breathe normally.

During treatment, the machine will move around you but nothing will touch you. You will not feel anything during the treatment. The machine will make a buzzing noise.

The treatment times are very short. Images are taken before to check that the treatment is correct before it is given. The radiographers watch you all the time on a screen. They will turn the machine off and enter the room if you move or call for help. Most people will be in the treatment room for about 15 – 20 minutes.

Once the machine has switched off, there is no radiation present. You will not be radioactive and you are safe to be near children and pregnant women.

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Your radiotherapy doctor will discuss with you the total number of treatments that you need and how often you need to attend the department.

What are the side effects of Radiotherapy?

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

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

Early or short-term side effects

These happen during your treatment and for several weeks afterwards:

Effects on the skin

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

- Radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction like exposure to the sun in the treatment area.
- Towards the end of treatment and the first 1 or 2 weeks after treatment, the skin may become red, dry and itchy.

We advise that you:-

- Wash the treated area daily with your usual soap or shower gel
- Use a soft towel to pat your skin dry
- Apply your usual moisturiser to the skin in the treatment area 2 or 3 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 or discuss this with your treatment radiographers at the start of your radiotherapy. They may be able to give you a sample moisturiser to try.

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- Avoid wearing tight clothes in the area being treated (cotton is a good natural fibre).
- Avoid shaving in the area being treated. If you must shave, 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.
- 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. Take care in the future by using a high factor sun cream – factor 50 or above.

Swimming

You may continue to swim if your skin is not blistered or peeling. You must wash the treatment area before and afterwards and apply moisturiser. Be aware that chlorinated water can have a drying effect on the skin. Do not swim if you have an infection or your skin is irritated.

You may not be able to swim if you are on chemotherapy due to the risk of infection. Please check with your specialist nurse.

Tiredness

- Most people will feel tired because of radiotherapy treatment.
- Tiredness will often come on slowly as the treatment progresses. It may last for some weeks after the treatment has finished.
- If you feel tired, try to rest as much as you can. Research has found that gentle exercise such as taking a short walk can help with tiredness.

Difficulty swallowing and indigestion:

- You may experience an increase in saliva or mucous, a sore mouth or mouth ulcers. Keep your mouth clean with regular brushing of teeth and gums with a soft toothbrush. A mouthwash can be prescribed if needed.

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- Your oesophagus (food pipe) can become sore making food difficult to swallow. 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 experience indigestion or heartburn. This can be helped by simple antacids.
- You may find it helpful to avoid hot or spicy foods and alcohol (particularly spirits).
- You will be referred to the oncology dietitian during your treatment for advice.

Loss of appetite:

- Radiotherapy treatment may change your sense of taste. You may lose your 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.
- You may also experience some tummy (abdominal) discomfort or bloating.

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.
- You may also experience some shortness of breath.

Pain:

- If you experience pains and discomfort in your chest area, please tell the radiographers.

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- Pain killers can be prescribed to make you feel more comfortable. You may find it helpful to take pain relief that is soluble (dissolves in water).
- Your radiotherapy doctor or radiographer will be able to give you more advice.

Hair loss:

- You will only lose hair in the treatment area.
- Hair loss can be permanent. Your consultant or a member of the team will be able to discuss this with you.

Occasionally some patients may need admitting to hospital to manage side effects on treatment.

Late or long-term side effects

Late side effects can happen months to years after you have completed treatment.

Changes to your oesophagus (food pipe)

- Narrowing of the food pipe (stricture). This 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.
- **Changes to the muscles of the food pipe (Oesophageal dysmotility)** - this can cause a change in swallowing.

Breathlessness

Radiation can cause inflammation (radiation pneumonitis) and scarring (fibrosis) of the lung. This can happen 2 to 3 months after finishing treatment.

On-going Fatigue

Less common late side effects include:

- Hypothyroidism – a hormone deficiency which may require medication.
- Heart damage - radiotherapy to the chest can cause inflammation of the lining surrounding the heart (pericarditis) or some weakening of the heart muscle (myopathy). This can cause chest pain and shortness of breath. This is rare and may require further investigation and treatment.
- Oesophageal or gastric ulceration or perforation (tear) which may require surgery.
- Oesophageal fistula – abnormal connection between oesophagus and the airway.
- Some patients may need a feeding tube long term.
- Myelitis - radiotherapy near the spinal cord carries a risk of nerve damage and a change in muscle power or sensation.
- Risk of rib / vertebral fractures.
- Bleeding- may require endoscopic treatment or surgery.
- Hyposplenism – the spleen no longer functions which lowers immunity and may require additional vaccinations and prophylactic antibiotics.
- Long-term decline in kidney function.
- Secondary cancers- There is a very small risk of developing a second cancer in the area treated in the years after treatment.

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

Contact the Macmillan information and support radiographer on 024 7696 7290, or your clinical nurse specialist if:

- you develop new symptoms after your treatment is over
- you are concerned that the immediate side effects are not getting better
- You'd like more information

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Treatment reviews

You may be booked in for a 'treatment review' at some point during your treatment. This review can be with a review radiographer, a doctor, or your specialist nurse. You will also be seen weekly by a dietitian.

At this review we will discuss:

- any side effects that you may be experiencing because of your treatment
- any side effects that may happen as the treatment continues.

At these review sessions it's not usually possible to give you any information on how effective the treatment has been so far.

This is for 2 reasons:

- although we take pictures of the treatment area during your radiotherapy, these are to check the position of the treatment field. They are not detailed enough to show us how well the treatment is working.
- 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 side effects of treatment will continue for several weeks after the treatment is complete. You will receive an appointment to see your consultant 4 - 6 weeks after finishing treatment. If you haven't received an appointment within 3 weeks of completing treatment, contact your consultant's secretary.

If you have any problems with your radiotherapy treatment, contact the Macmillan information and support radiographer on 024 7696 7290.

If your call is urgent, please call your own GP, or contact the acute oncology team on 024 7696 4000 and ask for Bleep 1641.

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 ask staff, or visit the Hospital website 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

It can be very difficult to park at busy times, so please allow extra time. There are several visitor car parks across the site. There are also drop-off points near the Arden Centre and the main entrance. These allow 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.

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, make a note of it or take a photo of the number plate.

Please note that free parking does not include:

- clinic appointments

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- counselling appointments

Public Transport

Many bus routes stop at the hospital. Buses drive onto the site and stop close to the main entrance. For more information about bus services visit: The Transport for West Midland website: <https://www.tfwm.org.uk/>

Hospital transport

Hospital transport is available for radiotherapy treatment, where there is a medical need. It may not be available for your CT planning scan or blood tests. It is not available for social or financial reasons.

You may not be entitled to access hospital transport if you:

- receive Disability Living Allowance Mobility Component or
- have a vehicle under the mobility scheme

If you need hospital transport and think 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 2669 662

Worcestershire Acute Trust Transport Service

0300 0110017

In most cases you will not be able to bring anyone with you. Your transport will be booked to get you to the hospital for your appointment time, but this

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cannot be guaranteed. You will be treated as soon as possible after you arrive.

Patients will often have to wait at the Arden Centre to be taken home for some time. This is due to the demand on the hospital transport service. We advise that patients make their own travel arrangements where possible.

If you are relying on the hospital transport service, bring food, drinks and any medication you may need with you. There is a refreshment kiosk available to buy snacks and drinks which is open from 10am-4pm.

Transport Schemes

Volunteer transport schemes are operating in some areas. These schemes may charge a mileage rate which varies. For more information, please ask to speak to the Macmillan information and support radiographers.

Prescriptions

All cancer patients are entitled to free prescriptions. If you need an exemption card, please ask a member of staff about how to apply.

Appointments

The department is usually open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm. It's closed at weekends and on public holidays.

You will be given a written appointment schedule on the first date of your treatment. Please check these dates. Notify your treatment radiographers as soon as possible if you need to change any dates or times. We'll try our best to give you the times you prefer, but this cannot be guaranteed.

If you are having chemotherapy alongside radiotherapy, we will try to manage appointments appropriately.

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Radiotherapy treatment machines are very complex. They are maintained by a team of in-house physicists and technicians. Delays in treatment can happen due to machine breakdowns and servicing.

There may be breaks in treatment due to public holidays and machine maintenance. We may ask some patients to come in on these days for treatment. A different treatment machine could be used.

It is not advisable for you to miss any other appointments. If this is unavoidable, please talk to the radiographers treating you.

We need to have a contact telephone number for you. We may have to call patients about appointments or with other information at short notice. If your telephone is set to stop incoming calls from withheld numbers, please give us a different telephone number.

Counselling

A counselling service is 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
Mon – Fri 9am to 5pm

Macmillan information and support radiographer on 024 7696 7290
Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm

Radiotherapy Planning team: 024 7696 7493

Acute Oncology (24-hour emergency advice) 024 7696 4105

Further information:

Cancer Information Centre 024 7696 6052

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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. The Centre is located on the ground floor in the main entrance

Open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm

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. This is so they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently in line with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust's complaints policy.

Written by the Macmillan information and support radiographers.

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

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 7290 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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

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



Document History

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