

Arden Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy information for patients undergoing treatment to the breast, chest wall and / or lymph nodes

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells in the treatment area. Radiotherapy can also change 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.uhcv.nhs.uk/our-services-and-people/our-departments/radiotherapy/>



Patient Information

Consent forms

Before you have this procedure, you'll need to sign a consent form. This 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 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 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.

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.

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.

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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.

For the CT scan and later treatments, you'll need to remove your clothing down to your waist. Gowns are available if you need one. Women may like to wear a small crop top which can then be pulled down when needed. Please ask if you are unsure.

You will be asked to lie on the couch on a special board with supports for your head and arms. Your head and shoulders will be slightly raised, and your arms will be up. If you have any difficulties lying with your arms up, it might be helpful to take painkillers before you come. Please let the radiographers know if you are uncomfortable or need help.

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 a reference for the planning process and during treatment. These can be washed off. At the Arden centre we no longer use a tattoo dot to mark your skin for treatment. This new technique is called "AlignRT" and uses specialist computers to map your skin and treatment position.

Deep Inspiration Breath Hold Treatment (DIBH)

Deep inspiration breath hold (DIBH) is used when treating patients who have left sided breast cancer, to reduce the dose to the heart. It involves taking a deep breath in and holding your breath for a short period of time as radiotherapy treatment is given.

If DIBH radiotherapy could be of benefit to you, your consultant will have discussed it with you before attending for the CT planning scan. However, the final decision about using DIBH will be made when you have your planning CT scan. Due to individual differences in shape, size, internal

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anatomy, and other factors, DIBH may not be suitable for you. If this is the case, you will receive standard radiotherapy. There is a separate information sheet about DIBH radiotherapy which will be given to you if appropriate.

Treatment

The radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant. You will lie in the same position you were in when you had your CT planning scan.

The radiographers will dim the room lights and use laser lights and cameras to position you correctly. When you and the machine are in the correct position, the radiographers leave the room to switch the machine on. You need to lie still. However, you can breathe normally unless you are having DIBH treatment, in which case you will already have been given instructions about breathing.

During the 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 will be 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. The cameras also monitor your position and turn off the machine automatically if you move. Most people will be in the treatment room for about 15-20 minutes, but sometimes it can take a little longer.

Once the machine has switched off, there is no radiation present. You will not be radioactive. You 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 radiotherapy?

Treatment is painless but it can cause some side effects. The side effects of radiotherapy treatment to the breast or chest wall are related to the type of breast surgery that you may have had, and the precise area that you are having treated. Most side effects will last for 2 - 6 weeks after radiotherapy has finished. They can be thought of as early (acute) and late (chronic):

Early side effects

These happen during your treatment and for several weeks afterwards:

Effects on the skin:

Radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction like exposure to the sun in the treatment area. Towards the end of treatment, and for a week or 2 after, the skin may become red, dry or appear darker, particularly under the breast and armpit. Rarely moist patches may develop.

We advise that you:

- Wash treated area daily with your usual soap or shower gel.
- Use a soft towel and 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 your 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.
- Continue to use deodorants if desired, unless they are found to irritate the skin or the skin is broken.
- Avoid wearing tight clothes in the area being (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 factor 50 sun cream.

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- Avoid shaving in the area being treated. If you must 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 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. You must wash the treatment area before and after swimming 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.

Effects on the breast:

Radiotherapy can cause the area being treated to swell slightly and feel tender and uncomfortable. This may be more noticeable towards the end of treatment and for a few weeks after. Try to find clothing that is comfortable, such as bras without wires.

Some patients complain of short sharp stabbing pains in the breast, particularly around their scar. Do take painkillers if needed.

If your supraclavicular nodes (throat/neck area) are being treated there is a slight risk of having a sore throat.

Tiredness

- Tiredness is a common side effect of radiotherapy and can last for some months. 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.
- More information on this is available from Macmillan cancer support.

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Hair loss

You will only lose hair in the treatment area. You may lose your underarm or chest hair on the side being treated. When it grows back it may be thinner or patchy.

Effects on the lungs:

Some patients may develop symptoms such as breathlessness, chest pain or dry cough. When this happens, it is usually about 4 weeks after the start of radiotherapy and can last up to 3 months. There is a less than a 1 in 100 risk of lung fibrosis over time.

Late side effects

The following late effects may happen months to years after completing radiotherapy:

- Some patients notice discomfort or swelling in the breast / chest wall / armpit. This should slowly subside but occasionally continues.
- Subtle changes in appearance, including breast size, shape and texture. The skin can also appear lighter, darker or pinker.
- If you had breast reconstruction using an implant before radiotherapy, you may find it hardens and needs to be replaced.
- Skin in the treatment area will always be more sensitive to the sun, so use a high factor sunscreen.
- Skin may also feel drier in the treatment area. You may continue to use a moisturising cream.
- Occasionally small blood vessels can become visible on the skin in the treatment area, particularly if a wax pad (bolus) was put onto your skin during treatment. This is called telangiectasia and is permanent. These tiny blood vessels cause threadlike red lines or patterns on the skin. These patterns are sometimes known as “spider veins” because of their fine and web-like appearance.
- You may experience some difficulty with moving your arm or shoulder, this can also be due to the surgery you have had. Rarely you may experience some pain, tingling, weakness of the shoulder, arm, hand or wrist.
- Very rarely the ribs may be more fragile after radiotherapy which could lead to a higher risk of fracture following trauma in later years.

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- Lymphoedema (swelling of the arm or hand), nerve pain, tingling and weakness in the arm can happen. The chances of this happening are 5 in 100, when radiotherapy is given to the breast or chest wall but increases to 20 in 100, when the lymph nodes above the collarbone are also treated. If lymphoedema is likely to be a problem, your consultant will discuss it with you. There are several treatments available that can help these symptoms.
- Where treatment is given to the lymph node areas in the neck above the collar bone, there may be a 2 in 100 risk of a stroke.
- Treatment is carefully planned to avoid treating an unnecessary amount of lung. Fibrosis (lung scarring) can cause breathlessness, cough or changes on an x-ray. There is a less than 1 in 100 risk of this.
- When radiotherapy is given for **left sided** breast cancer there is a very small risk of some damage to the heart muscle and blood vessels around the heart which could result in breathlessness, tiredness and dizzy spells. This is very rare.

Second malignancy

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 that you experience after your treatment with your consultant, breast care nurse or with your GP.

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

There is a Macmillan booklet "Managing the late effects of breast cancer treatment".

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 or breast care nurse. If there is a medical problem, you will see a doctor.

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, they 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 will continue for several weeks after the treatment is complete.

You will need to continue looking after your skin for 3 - 6 weeks after the completion of treatment. You will receive an appointment to see your consultant 6 to 12 weeks after finishing treatment.

If you have any problems with your radiotherapy treatment, contact the Macmillan information and support radiographer on **024 7696 7290** or your Breast care nurse at your local hospital.

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.

Patient Information

Please ask staff or visit the Hospital website for up-to-date maps and directions: www.uhcw.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 near 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
- 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 Midlands website: <https://www.tfwm.org.uk/>

Hospital Transport

Hospital transport is available for radiotherapy treatment, where there is a medical need. It is not 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)

HTG UK Leicestershire and Rutland Ambulance Service

0345 2413012

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 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.

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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 operate 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.

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

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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:

Arden cancer centre reception: 024 7696 7272

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

Radiotherapy planning team: 024 7696 7493

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Macmillan information and support radiographers: 024 7696 7290

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

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

NHS advice – use the 111 service if help is needed urgently but it is not an emergency.

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

Open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm

Macmillan Cancer Support: 0808 808 0000

www.macmillan.org.uk

Patient Information

Breast Cancer Now

<https://breastcancernow.org/>

Cancer Research UK:

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Patient Satisfaction

We hope that you have found this booklet helpful. We welcome your comments on the care and service that you have received within the Arden Cancer Centre.

We ask that specific complaints be directed 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 complaints policy.

Written by Julia Biggs & Michelle Evans

(Macmillan information and support radiographers)

With help and advice from the medical staff of the Arden Cancer Centre, University Hospitals Coventry and 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.

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

Help to stop smoking can be obtained from your local NHS stop smoking free Helpline on 0300 123 1044 or the hospital's stop smoking service 024 7696 4760.

Patient Information

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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