

## Arden Cancer Centre

# Radiotherapy information for patients having treatment to the skin

### What is radiotherapy?

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

Radiotherapy is delivered by highly trained staff called therapeutic radiographers on machines called Linear Accelerators, but some superficial skin treatments are given on a smaller machine called a DXR.

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.

### **Pacemakers**

**If you have a pacemaker or an implantable defibrillator, please mention this both to your doctor and the radiographers before your first treatment. 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.

### **Preparation before treatment starts**

Before treatment can start you will receive an appointment at the Arden Centre to plan the treatment. At this appointment, the area to be treated will be marked using a felt tipped pen and photographs will be taken so you don't have worry about the marks coming off before treatment starts. This will enable the radiographers to treat the area accurately.

In some cases, with your permission, it may be possible to put tiny permanent dots of dye just beneath the skin, which will not wash off, but we would not do this on the face. Some patients who are having treatment to the face or head will need to have a special mask made (see below) and we can put the marks onto that instead of on the skin.

To make the mask, you may need to have a mould made before treatment can start. The mask may be made of lead or other material depending on the type of treatment that you are having. This is so that treatment can be lined up accurately and areas that don't need treating can be protected.

## Patient Information

This is made in the mould room at the Arden Cancer Centre before treatment starts. There is a separate leaflet explaining this procedure.

It can be several weeks after this appointment before your treatment starts.

## Treatment

Radiographers will deliver the treatment as prescribed by your consultant using the skin marks or photographs taken at the previous appointment. If you had a mask made, you will need to wear this for every treatment - the radiographers will place it in the correct position.

Some treatments will require attachments to the treatment machine to come into contact with your skin. You may feel some pressure from the contact of the treatment machine, but it shouldn't be painful. For other treatments, the machine will be further away from you.

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 radiographers will be able to see you on a television monitor. If you need them, raise your hand and they will switch off the machine and come into you immediately.

## Internal eye shields

If the area to be treated is close to the eye it may be necessary to protect the eye using an internal eye shield. These go over the eyeball in the same way as a contact lens, resting on the eyeball beneath the eyelids.

However, internal eye shields are thicker than a contact lens so the radiographers will put two or three anaesthetic eye drops into your eye to numb it temporarily, so you feel nothing when the eye shield is either slipped in or removed.

## Patient Information

After the eye shield has been removed, a soft eye pad will be taped over the affected eye to protect it. It is very important to keep this on until the numbness wears off, probably for 2 to 3 hours, because during this time you would not feel anything getting into your eye such as grit, which could result in permanent damage.

You should not drive with the eye pad on. If you have nobody to drive for you, please wait in the Arden Centre until the pad can be safely removed or ask about hospital transport.

### **Lead masks**

Another method of treating close to the eye whilst at the same time protecting the eye from unwanted radiation is to use a special lead mask which fits closely over the area to be treated (as mentioned above).

### **Lead shielding**

For most patients, neither of the above methods is necessary. Any required eye protection can be efficiently achieved by placing small pieces of lead over the outside of the eyes, on top of the eyelids.

If the area to be treated is close to the nose or mouth it may be necessary to place small pieces of lead inside these areas to protect the mucosal lining.

When the area to be treated is an irregular shape it may be necessary to place pieces of lead onto the skin to protect the skin around the area to be treated.

### Side effects of treatment

Side effects will be confined to the area treated together with a small amount of tissue directly beneath this.

Possible side effects are:

- **Sore skin:** The skin treated is likely to become pink and slightly itchy about a week after your first treatment. In some cases, the area can become very sore and can become weepy and bleed, blisters and scabs may form after the treatment has finished, this may last for **6 to 12 weeks**. See below under skin care.
- **Lining of the nose:** If treatment is to the skin of the nose, a small part of the nose lining could be affected resulting in mild nose bleeds, particularly after blowing your nose. Scabs and dry blood inside the nose may make breathing through your nose difficult. This may occur about a week after the start of treatment and could continue for several weeks (see advice on nasal douching below). **If you are taking medicines that thin your blood, e.g. warfarin, and the bleeding is excessive, you must seek medical advice.**
- **Inside of your mouth:** If treatment is close to your lips, a small area of the lining inside your mouth just beneath the treated surface might get sore and take a few weeks to recover. It may help to rinse and gargle with some salt water (mix half a teaspoon of salt in a pint of warm water). For sore lips apply a lip balm / moisturiser.
- **Hair loss:** Hair loss only occurs in the area treated. This would occur two to three weeks after the first treatment. Re-growth may take place within three months but this hair loss could be permanent. Your doctor will discuss this with you before your radiotherapy starts.

### Skincare during your treatment

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

## Patient Information

- Avoid any perfumes, aftershaves, make-up 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; care should be taken in the future by using a high factor sun cream – factor 30 or above.
- 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 or wax should be used.
- If treating the head / scalp, wash hair gently with shampoo; avoid using a hairdryer or hair dye.
- You may continue to swim if your skin is intact and not visibly red, providing that you wash the treatment area before and afterwards and apply moisturiser.

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.

## **Skin care after completing treatment**

When you've finished your treatment course you will need to continue with the skincare above until any soreness has settled down. Do not rub the skin in the treated area or attempt to remove any remaining marks until the treatment effect has subsided.

### **Irritation**

The treated area will probably feel itchy at the end of treatment - avoid scratching the area. Your consultant may be able to prescribe a cream to help with this if it becomes a problem or try using a moisturising cream as above.

## Patient Information

### **Crusting or scabbing**

With some types of disease treated with X-rays or electrons, the treated area may crust over and form a scab which may weep or bleed if knocked. The healing takes place beneath this crust, and although temporarily you may feel the area looks worse than before treatment. This is a perfectly normal part of the healing process.

Wash around the crusting, but leave it alone, do not pull the crust off, it will loosen and drop off and another one may form as healing continues. During this time, it might bleed slightly but this is nothing to worry about. It is generally better left uncovered, exposed to the air, and the crust kept as dry as possible. It can take **2 to 12 weeks** to heal after treatment is complete.

If at any time you suspect that there is infection under the crust, please contact your own doctor.

### **Nasal douching**

Sometimes the lining inside your nose can become very sore and scabs may form which make it difficult for you to breathe through your nose.

You can loosen these scabs by nasal douching or rinsing:

- Take half a pint of slightly warm water (previously boiled and then allowed to cool down). Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon each of table salt, sugar, and sodium bicarbonate (bicarbonate of soda) and mix well.
- Pour small quantities of the mixture into your cupped hand or use an eggcup full.
- Hold your hand next to the nostrils and sniff the mixture into your nose.
- The mixture will pass into the nose and then to the back of the nose where it joins the throat.
- Allow the solution to drain out of the nostrils and spit out any of the solution which comes into your mouth into a bowl or sink.
- You could alternatively use a clean 'spray' type bottle or use a syringe to squirt it into your nostril.
- This is a little distasteful at first, but it is well worth continuing - repeat until the whole glassful is used up.
- Do this twice daily if needed.

## Patient Information

- Do not be alarmed by the material that you might spit out – it can be blood stained and of varying colours, thickness and shapes.
- Continue douching until your nasal breathing improves/ as needed.

### **Avoid sun and injury after treatment**

After the treatment effect has subsided, the treated skin will remain more fragile than the surrounding area, so care should be taken to avoid injury to it. It will also remain more sensitive to sun than adjacent untreated skin, so continue to keep strong sun off this area and use a factor 50 suncream.

### **Treatment reviews**

At some point during your treatment, you may be booked in for a 'treatment review'. This review can be with either a review radiographer or a doctor. 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.

It is not usually possible to give you any information on how effective the treatment has been until several weeks after as 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.

### **Follow-up appointments**

Your Radiotherapy consultant will want to check your progress at an out-patient clinic, usually about 6 to 12 weeks after the end of treatment. This will be posted to you after completion of your treatment. If you haven't received this within 4 weeks of completing treatment, please telephone your consultants secretary at the hospital where you first saw your consultant:

UHCW NHS Trust: 02476 92 7272

Warwick Hospital: 01926 495321 Ext 8293

George Eliot: 02476 865371

## 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](http://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 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.**

### Public Transport

Many bus routes include the hospital with buses driving onto the site, stopping close to the main entrance. **For more information about bus services to University Hospital call the travel line on 0870 608 2608 or visit [www.networkwestmidlands.com](http://www.networkwestmidlands.com)**

## Patient Information

### **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 011 0017

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 to 4pm (Maybe closed due to covid-19 restrictions).

## **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 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 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday and is closed at weekends and on public holidays.
- On the first day of treatment you will be given a written appointment schedule. Please check these dates and notify your treatment radiographers as soon as possible if you need to change any dates or times.
- Every effort will be made to give you times that you prefer but this cannot be guaranteed.
- Radiotherapy treatment machines are very complex and they are maintained by a team of in-house physicists and technicians. Delays in treatment can occur due to machine breakdowns and servicing.
- There may be breaks in treatment due to public holidays and machine maintenance. These do not affect most people's treatment. However, some patients may be asked to come in for treatment on these days when a different treatment machine could be used.
- It is not advisable for you to miss any other appointments but, if it is unavoidable, please talk to the radiographers who are treating you.
- It is important that we have a contact telephone number for you as we 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 another telephone number.

## Patient Information

### **Counselling**

There is a counselling service available at the Arden Centre, for more information speak to your specialist nurse, doctor or radiographer, or telephone 024 7696 7478.

### **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 by the main entrance.

### **Useful telephone numbers**

#### **Arden Cancer Centre – Radiotherapy Reception - 024 7696 7272**

Open Monday to Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm

#### **Radiotherapy Planning: 024 7696 7493**

Monday – Friday 9:00am to 5.00pm

#### **Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist - 024 7696 7290**

Available Monday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

#### **Oncology Ward 35 (24 hour emergency advice only):024 7696 5528**

#### **Acute Oncology** (evenings and weekends)

UHCW switchboard 024 7696 4000

Ask to bleep acute oncology on 1641

**NHS advice** - use the 111 service

#### **Macmillan Cancer Support - 0808 808 00 00**

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

### **Patient 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.

## Patient Information

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.

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 am to 5pm and speak to the Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist.

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

The Trust operates a smoke free policy. Help to stop smoking can be obtained from your local NHS Stop Smoking Service: Tel. **0300 123 1044**

Written by Alison Crichton and Julia Biggs (Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists), with the help and advice from the Medical Staff and Radiotherapy Radiographers of the Arden Cancer Centre, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, Coventry, CV2 2DX

### Did we get it right?

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

Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:

[www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback)



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