

Radiotherapy for abdominal cancer

Radiotherapy Department Patient information

What is radiotherapy?

Your doctor has recommended that you have radiotherapy. Radiotherapy is a treatment used to treat cancer and other diseases. It can be used alone or in combination with chemotherapy, surgery, or hormone therapy.

Radiotherapy is the use of high energy rays, usually x-rays. It works by destroying the cancer cells in the treated area. It can also cause some damage to normal cells in the treatment area. This is why radiotherapy can have side effects. Giving the treatment as a course of short daily treatments gives the normal cells a chance to recover.

The number of treatments that you will receive depends on your needs. It will be decided by the consultant or registrar at your clinic appointment. This information leaflet is intended as a guide. If you have any questions about your treatment, please ask any of the team looking after you.

Planning your radiotherapy

Planning is a very important part of radiotherapy. It ensures the radiotherapy is targeted and causes the least damage to the surrounding healthy tissues.

You will receive an appointment for a radiotherapy planning CT scan. The planning session can take up to an hour. For this scan you will be positioned exactly as you will be every day for your treatment. During this appointment pen marks are drawn onto the skin which will be used to align you accurately. They can be washed off after your scan.

After this appointment you will be given a date to start your radiotherapy. This will usually be a couple of weeks later as the planning process is complex. You will also be given an appointment for a telephone new patient clinic. This will be booked for the working day before your radiotherapy starts. This is a good opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have. You are welcome to have a family member or friend with you for this telephone call.

Treatment

You will be positioned on the treatment bed in the same position you were in when your treatment was planned. This is done by using a red light which shines onto your body.

Your stomach area will need to be free of clothing so you can be positioned accurately. You will need to lie very still but breathe normally. You will not feel anything during the radiotherapy - it is like having an x-ray taken.

The radiographers will need to leave the room while the radiation is on. They will be able to see you through a camera and hear you through the intercom. The treatment can be paused if needed. Music can be played to help you relax if you would like it.

The whole appointment will take about 15 minutes. Routine checks will be carried out on some days which may extend the time slightly.

It is important that you are not, or do not become, pregnant during treatment. Remember to continue to use contraception if necessary. If you have any concerns on this subject, please discuss them with your treatment team.

Skin care advice

During your radiotherapy and for a while afterwards, your skin may change in the area being treated. It may not be possible to stop a skin reaction, but by following this advice you should feel more comfortable. Please talk to your treatment team if you are having problems so you can be given advice.

Reduce friction by:

1. washing the skin gently in the treatment area with soap and water. Pat the skin dry and avoid rubbing the area.
2. wearing loose fitting, natural fibre clothing to reduce discomfort.
3. avoiding shaving and waxing in the area.

Reduce irritation by:

- using a moisturiser in the treatment area. One which does not contain sodium lauryl sulphate is better, such as E45. There is no need to wipe the moisturiser off before treatment.
- avoiding antibiotic creams unless there is a known infection.
- avoiding sun exposure in the treatment area during radiotherapy. Use a high factor sun cream after finishing radiotherapy.
- avoiding extremes of temperature such as heating and cooling pads.

Other advice:

- You may swim if your skin isn't broken. Shower after swimming to wash off the chlorine and apply your moisturiser. Please stop swimming if it irritates your skin.
- Smoking is likely to make your skin reaction worse. If you need help to stop, please ask for advice.

Side effects of radiotherapy

There are some side effects to radiotherapy. These tend to build up slowly towards the end of treatment. How severe the side effects are will vary from one person to another and depends on many factors. They will last for about two weeks after treatment is finished and then start to improve over the following months.

Please discuss any side effects that you are experiencing with your treatment team. They are there to help you and can give you advice when you need it.

During your treatment course you will also have a review appointment with your review radiographer or doctor. This is alongside your normal daily radiotherapy and will be on your appointment list. You will have the chance to discuss how you are feeling and to ask any questions you may have. The radiographers can arrange extra reviews for you if needed. Common side effects are:

- **Tiredness:** this varies between patients and can be due to many factors. Do as much as you feel able to and rest when you need to. Often light exercise such as a short walk can help.
- **nausea:** your doctor may prescribe you anti-sickness medication. Natural remedies such as peppermint or ginger can also be helpful. Eat little and often rather than attempting big meals.
- **Skin:** your skin may become pinker or darker in the area treated. Sometimes a rash may appear and feel itchy. Following the skin care advice above will help to keep it more comfortable.

- **bowel:** radiotherapy can cause your bowels to be looser than normal. If this happens you can reduce the fibre in your diet. It is also possible to be prescribed medication such as Imodium.
- **Loss of hair:** this will only occur in the treated area.

After your treatment course is completed, you will be given a follow-up appointment to see your consultant or registrar in 6-8 weeks. You will subsequently be followed up regularly for some time.

Emotional support

It is normal to have feelings of anxiety, fear, or sadness during your treatment. The radiotherapy staff are there to support you and will always make time for your needs. If you're feeling down, it may help to talk with a friend or relative. Sometimes, it can help to talk with someone outside the family who has been through a similar experience.

The Cancer Care Map is a website that you can search for lots of local support groups. You can put in your post code to show support groups in your area.

Complementary therapies

The department has a range of free complementary therapies on offer to all patients. They can help you cope with your treatment. If you would like further details, please speak to one of your radiographers, or you can call the complementary therapists directly on **0300 019 8268**.

Chapel

There is a Chapel within Poole Hospital which is open to people of all faiths. It is on level one of the hospital and is open 24 hours a day. If you would like to speak to a member of the chaplaincy team, you can call them directly on **0300 019 2167**.

Contact details

During treatment:

- If you need to contact the department during your course of radiotherapy you will find telephone numbers for your treatment unit at the bottom of your appointment list.

Radiotherapy helpline:

- For radiotherapy related enquiries before or after treatment there is the Dorset radiotherapy helpline (DORAH). This is an answerphone service which is checked by radiotherapy radiographers between 8am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday, but a message can be left at any time. Please call **0300 019 2481**. Please note this helpline is not for emergencies.

Oncology patient hotline:

- For urgent enquiries, day or night, contact the oncology patient hotline on **0300 019 4302**. If your call is not answered you will need to leave a message stating your name, hospital number, and contact telephone number. You should be phoned back within half an hour - in the unlikely event that you are not, please call again.

Nurse specialists

You should have been given details of your specialist nurse. It might be helpful to add them to this leaflet. Please ask if you are not sure who your specialist nurse is.

Name:

Contact number:

For further general health-related information please visit or contact:

Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

Tel: **0808 808 0000**

www.macmillan.org.uk

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To ask for this leaflet in larger print, please contact the patient experience team on **0300 019 8499**
or email **uhd.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net**.

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