

# Radiotherapy for prostate cancer

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## Radiotherapy Department Patient information

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### 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 with chemotherapy, surgery, or hormone therapy.

Radiotherapy is the use of high energy rays, usually x-rays. It works by destroying 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 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 specific treatment, please ask any of the team looking after you.

Please watch our prostate radiotherapy preparation videos by visiting our radiotherapy page on the UHD website: [www.uhd.nhs.uk](http://www.uhd.nhs.uk) and clicking on 'our services' then 'R' then 'radiotherapy'

or using the website:

[www.cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/preparing-for-prostate-radiotherapy-treatment](http://www.cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/preparing-for-prostate-radiotherapy-treatment)



Please scan the QR code using the camera on your phone.  
A link will appear that you can follow to view the videos.

### 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. This will form part of the measurement process. The planning session can take up to two hours. 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 plan your treatment accurately.

The radiographers will explain to you the preparation for the scan and treatment. You will also need to drink plenty, ideally two litres a day. Try to avoid eating foods which make you gassy.

After this appointment you will be given a date to start your radiotherapy. This will usually be a couple of weeks later. You will also be given an appointment for a telephone appointment at the new patient clinic, which will be booked for the working day before your radiotherapy starts. This is a good opportunity for you to ask any questions that you may have thought of.

## Treatment

You will need to have an empty bowel and full bladder for every treatment. Please follow the preparation instructions that are given to you at your planning scan. If the treatment unit is running late, try to work out when you will be going in and change your drinking time.

You will be positioned on the couch 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 pelvic 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.

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

## 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.

## Short term side effects

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 depend on many factors. They will last for about two weeks after treatment is finished and then start to improve over the following months.

During your treatment course you will have a review appointment with your review radiographer. 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.

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

### **Expected - 50-100% (half to all) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Tiredness:** this varies between patients. Do as much as you feel able to and rest when you need to. Often light exercise such as a short walk can help.
- **Urinary frequency, urgency, slower flow:** avoid drinking alcohol, especially spirits. Try to avoid high caffeine drinks, fizzy drinks, acidic drinks, and those with artificial sweeteners. Drinking plenty of water will help, but if your sleep is disturbed, reduce how much you drink towards the end of the evening. You can also be given medication.

### **Common - 10-50% (10-50 in 100) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Hair loss:** this will only occur in the treated area.
- **Bowel frequency and urgency, looser stools:** you may need to alter your diet to reduce diarrhoea or gas. Please speak to your treatment team about this and they can provide you with a diet sheet. You can also take medication such as Imodium if needed.

### **Less common - less than 10% (10 in 100) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Skin reaction:** your skin may become pinker or darker. It may feel dry, tight, or sore. Sometimes a rash can appear and it can feel itchy. Following the skin care advice above will help to keep you more comfortable.
- **Pain when urinating:** drinking plenty can help.
- **Rectal pain and a feeling of not completely emptying your bowels:** your usual pain relief can be taken as needed.
- **Bleeding in your urine or stools:** preparation H cream can be used if your anus is sore and bleeding.

### **Rare - less than 1% (1 in 100) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Urinary retention:** a catheter can be used if needed.
- **Urinary leaking:** please speak to your treatment team if you are concerned about this. Pelvic floor exercises can help.

## Longer term side effects

These can occur months to years after radiotherapy. The doctor who saw you for your initial appointment should have discussed them with you. Only a small number of patients will develop any of these long-term side effects. For most people these side effects are mild and do not affect everyday life.

Your radiotherapy is planned very carefully to avoid as much surrounding tissue as possible and minimise the risk of these side effects.

### **Expected - 50-100% (half to all) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Infertility:** please let the treatment team know if this is a concern for you.

### **Common - 10-50% (10-50 in 100) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Urinary frequency and urgency:** avoiding alcohol and caffeine can help.
- **Bowel urgency and looser stools:** changes in diet can help. You can take medication such as Imodium. Keep a food diary to see if there are certain foods which make it worse.
- **Changes in ejaculation and difficulties having an erection:** there is medication that can be prescribed. You can also see a specialist to help with this.

### **Less common - less than 10% (less than 10 in 100) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Pain when urinating or needing to urinate more often.**
- **Urinary stricture:** narrowing of the water pipe which may need surgery.
- **Emptying your bowels more often:** changes in diet can help.
- **Pain in the rectum.**
- **Bleeding from your bladder or bowel**

### **Rare - less than 1% (less than 1 in 100) of people having radiotherapy**

- **Bowel/bladder damage requiring surgery**
- **Second malignancy:** radiotherapy is associated with a very small risk of developing a second cancer many years later. The benefits from the radiotherapy outweigh this very small risk.
- **Bone fractures:** the bones can become more brittle in the area treated.
- **Urinary leaking:** pelvic floor exercises can help.

After your treatment finishes, you will have a telephone follow-up appointment with the review radiographer or specialist nurse in 10-12 weeks. Please go for a PSA blood test about a week before. You will then be followed up with regular PSA tests.

## **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 1 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 8153** or **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, 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.

## Urology nurse specialists

Poole Hospital Tel: **0300 019 8635**

Royal Bournemouth Hospital Tel: **0300 019 4977**

Dorchester Hospital Tel: **01305 255145**

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

### Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

Telephone: **0808 808 0000**

**www.macmillan.org.uk**

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please visit our website: **www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets**  
and use the language and accessibility function available along the top of the site.

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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