

Radiotherapy for sarcoma

Radiotherapy Department Patient information

What is radiotherapy?

Your doctor has recommended that you have radiotherapy. Radiotherapy is a treatment that is 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 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 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 that will be 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. This will form part of the measurement process. The planning session usually takes 30 minutes. For this scan you will be positioned exactly as you will be every day for your treatment. Pen marks will also be drawn onto the skin - these will be used to position you accurately.

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 a telephone appointment for a 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 couch in the same position you were in when you were planned. This is done by using a red light which shines onto your body. The treatment area will need to be free of clothing to enable the accuracy of your position. 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 by 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 and we will be able to give you advice.

Reduce friction by:

- washing the skin gently in the treatment area with soap and water. Pat the skin dry and avoid rubbing the area.
- wearing loose fitting, natural fibre clothing to reduce discomfort.
- 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 cream. There is no need to wipe the moisturiser off before treatment.
- stopping the use of your usual deodorant if irritation occurs or the skin is broken.
- avoiding antibiotic creams unless there is a known infection.
- avoiding sun exposure in the treatment area during radiotherapy. Use a high factor sun cream when you have finished 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

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

Please discuss any side effects you experience 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 doctor or 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.

- **Tiredness:** this varies greatly 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.
- **Skin:** your skin may become pinker or darker. It may feel dry, tight, or sore. Sometimes a rash may appear and feel itchy. Following the skin care advice above will help to keep it more comfortable
- **Hair loss:** this will only occur in the treated area.
- **Aches and pains:** you may find you have twinges or sharp shooting pains in the treatment area. This is normal and may last for a while after the treatment has finished.
- **Lymphoedema:** if you have had surgery to remove the lymph nodes (glands) it is important to take particular care on the treated side. If it becomes swollen or you would like further information, please let a member of your team know.

After your treatment is finished you will be given a follow up appointment to see your consultant or registrar in 6 - 8 weeks. You will then 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 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 specific 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 **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.

For further information please contact:

Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

Telephone: **0808 808 00 00**

www.macmillan.org.uk.

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or email uhd.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

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