

Radiotherapy for pelvic cancer (short course)

Radiotherapy Department Patient information

What is radiotherapy?

Your doctor has recommended you have radiotherapy. Radiotherapy is used to treat cancer and other diseases. It can be used alone. Some patients also have chemotherapy, surgery, or hormone therapy.

Radiotherapy uses high energy rays, usually x-rays. It destroys 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. Treatment is given as short, daily treatments. This gives time for normal cells to recover.

The number of treatments you will have depends on your needs. Your doctor will decide at your clinic appointment. This information leaflet is a guide. If you have any questions, please ask the team looking after you.

Planning your radiotherapy

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

You will have an appointment for a radiotherapy planning CT scan. The appointment will usually take 30 minutes. For this scan you will lie on the bed. This is in the position you will be in for your treatment. Pen marks are put on the skin.

You will be given a date to start your treatment. This is normally a couple of weeks later. This allows time to plan your treatment. You will also have an appointment for a telephone call. This will be the working day before your radiotherapy starts. This is a good chance to ask any questions.

Treatment

You will lie on the bed. This is in the same position as your planning scan. A red light shines onto your body. Your pelvis will need to be free of clothing. This is to position you correctly. You will need to lie very still. You can 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. They can hear you through the intercom. They can pause the treatment 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. This may make some days slightly longer.

It is important that you are not, or do not become, pregnant during treatment. Remember to use contraception if needed. If you have any questions about this talk to your treatment team.

Skin care advice

During your radiotherapy your skin may change. This is in the area being treated. This can happen for a while afterwards. Please talk to your treatment team if you have any problems.

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. Using one which does not contain sodium lauryl sulphate is better, such as E45. You don't need to wipe the cream 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. How bad they are changes between people. They will last for about two weeks after treatment has finished. They will then improve over the following months.

Please discuss any side effects with your treatment team. They are there to help you.

- **Bowel:** your bowels may be looser than normal. If this happens, you can eat less fibre for a few weeks. You can also use medication like Imodium.
- **Bladder:** you may have bladder symptoms. This can be needing to go to the toilet more often or more urgently. Do not drink alcohol, especially spirits. Try to drink plenty of water.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Nausea:** ginger or peppermint can help. There is also medicine you can be given. Eat little and often rather than big meals.
- **Loss of hair:** this will only occur in the treated area.

After the end of treatment, you will see a doctor in 6 - 8 weeks. You will be followed up for some time.

Complementary therapies

The department has 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. You can call the complementary therapists **0300 019 8268**.

Chapel

There is a Chapel within Poole Hospital. This is open to people of all faiths. It is on Level 1 of the hospital. It is open 24 hours a day. You can call the team on **0300 019 8153** or **0300 019 2167**.

Contact details

During treatment:

- Phone numbers are on the bottom of your appointment list.

Radiotherapy helpline:

- For radiotherapy questions after treatment there is the Dorset Radiotherapy Helpline (DORAH). This is an answerphone. It is checked by between 8am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday. 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 questions call the oncology patient hotline **0300 019 4302**. This can be called day or night. If your call is not answered leave a message. Give your name, hospital number, and contact telephone number. You should be called within half an hour. If you are not, please call again.

Nurse specialist

You should have the name 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

Telephone: **0808 808 0000**

www.macmillan.org.uk

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or email **uhd.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net**.

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