

# Stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR) for prostate cancer

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## Radiotherapy Department Patient information

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### What is stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy (SABR)?

Your doctor has recommended 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 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. Short daily treatments give the normal cells a chance to recover.

SABR is an effective way of giving highly focused radiotherapy. High doses of radiation can be given to the prostate. Dose to other organs is limited. It does this by using:

- fewer treatment sessions - often five sessions a day apart. For example Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
- images taken during treatment looking at your prostate and surrounding organs. This checks everything is in the right place for treatment.
- high doses of radiation at each treatment.

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

Please watch our prostate radiotherapy preparation videos. Visit 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-radiotherapy-treatment](http://www.cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/preparing-for-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. This targets the radiotherapy to cause the least damage to the nearby healthy tissues.

You will have an appointment for a radiotherapy planning CT scan of your pelvis. This will form part of the measurement process. The planning session can take up to two hours. 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.

The radiographers will explain to you the preparation for the scan and treatment.

## Hydration

You need to have a full bladder for treatment. It is important you are well hydrated. You will need to drink plenty of clear fluids with no alcohol. This is important even before you come for planning or treatment. We will ask you to drink plenty, ideally two litres a day. Try not to have drinks with alcohol or caffeine, or fizzy drinks. This includes tea, coffee, and cola. You should start drinking plenty **five days before the planning scan**.

## Diet

Try to avoid eating foods which make you gassy. Eat a balanced diet and try to avoid any food which gives you wind. This could be spicy foods, beans, pulses, lentils, onions, and fizzy drinks. Keeping some fibre in your diet is important. This is to keep your bowels the same during treatment.

## Exercise

Regular gentle exercise can help to keep your bowels regular. For example, a 30-minute daily walk. If you have wind before your appointment, moving can help. Try walking around, moving your legs, or bending or twisting at the waist. This can be helpful to release it.

## Enema

We will also ask you to do an enema during your treatment. This will be:

- two days before the planning scan
- the day of your planning scan
- two days before starting treatment
- on each treatment appointment.

This is to make sure your rectum is empty for treatment. The radiographers will go through how to use the enema.

After the planning appointment you will be given a date to start your radiotherapy. This will be a couple of weeks later. You will also have a phone call two working days before your radiotherapy starts. This is a good chance for you to ask any questions.

## Treatment

You will need to have an empty bowel and drink a set amount of water. This is before the planning CT scan and every treatment. Please follow the instructions you are given. You may need to change your timings if the treatment machine is running late.

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 30 minutes.

## 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.

## Short term side effects

There are some side effects to radiotherapy. These often start during or just after treatment has finished. How severe the side effects are will vary from one person to another. They should start to settle about 3-4 weeks after the treatment ends. They will then improve over the following months.

You will have a review appointment with your review radiographer. This will be towards the end of your treatment. This will be on your appointment list. You can talk about how you are feeling and ask any questions. The radiographers can arrange extra reviews for you if needed.

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

## Expected

- **Tiredness:** this varies between patients. This can happen during treatment or just after treatment finishes. It may last for many weeks. Do as much as you feel able to and rest when you need to. Light exercise such as a short walk can help.
- **Urinary frequency, urgency, slower flow:** Try to avoid drinks containing:
  - alcohol
  - caffeine
  - artificial sweetener
  - fizzy drinks

Drinking plenty of water will help. If you wake in the night, drink less towards the end of the day. There is medicine we can give you.

## Common

- **Prostate:** Your prostate may be sore and swollen. This can cause pressure on the urethra (the tube urine passes through). You may find your urine flow becomes slower. You can find it hard to start, or there can be a dribble at the end. You may feel your bladder doesn't completely empty. You can have a desire to go again soon after.
- **Bowel frequency and urgency, looser poo:** You may need to alter your diet to help diarrhoea or gas. Please speak to your treatment team about this. They can give you a diet sheet. You can also take medicine such as Imodium if needed.
- **Rectum (back passage):** The wall of your back passage may become inflamed. You can feel like you need to go to the toilet more often. If you have piles (haemorrhoids) or have had these before, they may get a little worse during treatment.

## Less common

- **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:** you can take pain relief as needed.
- **Bleeding in your urine or stools:** if you have blood in your stools or your bottom is sore, you can use Preparation H cream.
- **Sexual activity:** your treatment will cause a general swelling in the prostate gland. This can cause discomfort or pain during sex. It may be best to avoid having sex until the effects of radiotherapy settle. After treatment, a small number of people find ejaculation is uncomfortable. There is a chance you may experience erectile dysfunction. This means it may be difficult to get or keep an erection.

## Rare

- **Urinary retention:** you may need a catheter.
- **Urinary leaking:** please speak to your treatment team if you are worried. Pelvic floor exercises can help.

## Longer term side effects

These can happen months or years after radiotherapy. The doctor who sees you at the beginning should have discussed them with you. Only a small number of patients will have 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 to reduce the risk of late side effects. It is important to follow the bowel and bladder preparation during treatment.

## Expected

- **Infertility:** please speak to the treatment team if this is a worry for you.

## Common

- **Urinary frequency and urgency:** avoiding alcohol and caffeine can help.
- **Bowel urgency and looser poo:** changes in diet can help. You can take medicine such as Imodium. Keep a food diary to see if there are foods which make it worse.

- **Changes in ejaculation and difficult to have an erection:** there is risk of losing sexual function. You might find it difficult to get and keep an erection. This can be due to damage to some of the nerves. There is medication you can take. You can also see a specialist to help with this. Patients who can get an erection may make little or no semen on ejaculation.

## Less common

- **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:** Small blood vessels can form in the lining of the bowel and bladder. This can be a year after treatment. They are more delicate than normal and may break. This can cause bleeding from the back passage or in the urine. If this happens, it may seem frightening at first but is not normally serious. You should let your GP or specialist nurse know. They may wish to do some tests.

## Rare

- **Bowel/ bladder damage needing surgery.**
- **Second cancer:** there is a very small risk of having a second cancer because of radiotherapy 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 phone follow up appointment. This will be 10-12 weeks after treatment. Please go for a PSA blood test about a week before. You will then have 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. 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.

The Cancer Care Map is a website [www.cancercaremap.org](http://www.cancercaremap.org). You can put in your post code to show support groups in your area.

## 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 on **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 phone number**. They should phone back within half an hour. If 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](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

The phone numbers for your treatment unit are on the bottom of your appointment list. Use these numbers if you need to contact the department during your course of radiotherapy.

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please visit our website: [www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets)  
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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](mailto:uhd.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net).

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