

Patient information factsheet

Radiotherapy to the brain

Your doctor has referred you for radiotherapy treatment. Radiotherapy involves the use of high-energy radiation and is commonly used to treat cancer - almost half of people with cancer have radiotherapy as part of their treatment plan.

This factsheet explains what to expect at your radiotherapy treatment appointments. It aims to answer some of the initial questions you are likely to have but if you would like more information or have any concerns, please speak to a radiographer who will be pleased to advise you.

What to expect when you come for treatment

When you arrive in the radiotherapy department, check in using your barcode letter and take a seat in the waiting area.

Once you enter the treatment room the radiographer will ask you to confirm your **name, date of birth** and **address**. This will happen each time you attend for treatment.

The radiographer will carefully put you into the right position for treatment, using the reference marks on your mask from your CT planning scan. These marks enable us to deliver your treatment accurately, so it's important that you stay still.

As well as your radiotherapy treatment, you may need to have blood tests, or to see a dietitian and/or doctor on a regular basis.

Your appointment schedule

You will be given a list of your upcoming appointments on your first day of treatment, but please be aware that they are **subject to change**. We will let you know if we need to change one of your appointments.

Side effects

You may begin to notice some side effects during your second or third week of radiotherapy. It's important to remember that treatment reactions are very individual and the severity will differ from person to person. You may experience some of these side effects or none at all.

Effects on the skin

Over time, the skin in the area of treatment may become red and itchy. The following skin care advice will help to minimise any reaction:

- treat the area gently and avoid vigorous rubbing
- avoid very hot or very cold water whilst washing
- use your normal washing products – don't suddenly change brands or use a new product while you are having radiotherapy
- use a mild shampoo to wash your hair
- avoid using a hairdryer, pat hair dry with a soft towel

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- avoid applying any extra products
- wear a scarf or hat to protect the skin as it will be more sensitive to weather conditions, such as sun and wind

Tiredness (fatigue)

As your treatment progresses you may find yourself becoming more tired. We would encourage you to get a little light exercise and to drink plenty of fluids to reduce fatigue.

Headaches

Some people find they have more headaches at the beginning of their treatment. It's fine to take your usual painkillers for headaches unless you have been advised not to. Let the radiographer know if your headaches are troublesome or persistent.

Hair loss

Hair loss varies from person to person and will depend on the treatment you are having. Symptoms will range from thinning of the hair to complete hair loss in the treatment area, and for some people this may be permanent. Your doctor or radiographer will be able to discuss this with you. Hair loss is gradual and usually starts two to three weeks into treatment, but may continue after you finish. The radiographer can arrange an appointment in the Macmillan Centre for a wig fitting at your request.

Other side effects

Very occasionally, people experience other side effects such as nausea (feeling sick), dizziness, visual and hearing disturbances. If you are concerned about any symptoms, please let the radiographers know.

If you notice any changes or side effects during your treatment, please discuss them with the radiographers. They will be able to offer advice or reassurance and suggest ways to help you cope.

Useful information

Steroids

Carry on taking any steroids you have been prescribed unless your doctor advises you not to. Please ensure you do not run out of your steroids as stopping them suddenly will make you very unwell. Let the radiographer or clinic nurse know if you are running out of tablets two to three days before you need them.

Driving

Please speak to your doctor about the driving regulations that may apply to you.

Temozolomide / 'Temodal' clinic

You may be prescribed a chemotherapy drug called Temozolomide in addition to your radiotherapy. We will give you more information and, if possible, introduce you to the specialist team before you start your treatment. The radiographers may need to adjust your treatment appointments to coincide with taking your Temozolomide tablets.

You will have weekly blood tests and appointments at the Temodal clinic during your radiotherapy treatment.

Frequently asked questions

- **Will I be radioactive?** You will not be radioactive; it's perfectly safe for you to be around family and friends.
- **Can I swim?** While we would normally encourage physical exercise, swimming in chlorinated water can dry your skin out further and could cause a worse skin reaction.

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- **After treatment, can I continue with my normal activities?** Yes you can, within reason. If you start to feel really tired or unwell you may have to make adjustments.
- **Do I feel anything as the treatment is happening?** No, you don't feel a thing. It's quick and painless.
- **Can I miss treatments?** We would advise that you do not miss a treatment once you have started. You might find that there are gaps in your appointment schedule, which may be due to machine services or public holidays. We work hard to minimise these gaps and you may on occasion be asked to attend on a weekend or public holiday.

Parking

Car park 8 is outside the oncology centre. This can be found by following directions for the eye unit. Parking spaces are limited, so allow plenty of time to park.

If you are having radiotherapy treatment you are entitled to a discount on parking. Remember to validate your ticket at the radiotherapy reception before paying at the parking machine.

Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre

The centre is located on B level in the East Wing courtyard. Opening hours are Monday to Friday, from 10am to 4pm. Drop-in sessions are available or you can book an appointment on telephone:

023 8120 6037.

Who to contact if you have concerns

If you have urgent symptoms relating to your current radiotherapy treatment, please call the acute oncology service at Southampton General Hospital on **07867 973649**. This number is answered 24-hours, seven days a week, but is only for treatment-related symptoms and not for general queries such as rearranging appointments or hospital transport, for example.

If your symptoms are not urgent, you can speak to one of the radiographers when you attend for your radiotherapy treatment.

In an emergency call **999**.

Useful links

Cancer Research UK – About brain tumour radiotherapy:

www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/brain-tumour/treatment/radiotherapy/about-brain-tumour-radiotherapy

NHS Choices – Malignant brain tumours – Treatment:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/brain-tumour-malignant/Pages/Treatment.aspx

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.