

Patient information factsheet

Radiotherapy to the prostate or prostate bed

Your doctors have recommended you have 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.

Before your appointment

You will need to undress and put on a hospital gown for your treatment, so please make sure you wear clothing and shoes to each appointment that are quick and easy to loosen. We would suggest slip-on shoes or sandals and trousers or shorts with an elasticated waist.

You should eat normally before your treatment.

What to expect

You will be asked to arrive at a set time before your radiotherapy appointment so that you can drink fluids to fill your bladder before having treatment (see preparing for your treatment below).

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

The radiographers will tell you when to start drinking your fluids, and may ask you to change into a hospital gown before you go into the treatment room.

When you go into the treatment room the radiographer will ask you to confirm your name, date of birth and address. This will be repeated each time you attend for treatment.

Preparing for your treatment

It's important for the accuracy of your treatment that your bladder is as comfortably full as when you came for your CT planning scan. We will give you a specific quantity of fluid and a set amount of time in which to drink it, based on the information recorded at your planning scan. Please ensure you arrive with enough time before your appointment for this to take place. A radiographer will come and tell you when to start drinking.

If at any time you feel that you are struggling to hold your bladder or that you are not 'comfortably full', please tell the radiographers before they take you into the treatment room.

In the treatment room

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

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Before your treatment starts you will have a cone beam CT scan (CBCT) which allows us to check the position of your prostate specifically for the treatment. If there is too much wind, your rectum is too full or there isn't enough fluid in your bladder the treatment will not go ahead. If this is the case, the radiographers will advise you on what is required to allow your treatment to proceed successfully. This may involve drinking more fluid or waiting longer for your bladder to fill. They will try this scan up to three times a day. If the scan is still not successful after the third attempt the radiographers will discuss the next steps with you, which may include sending you away without treatment that day.

When your treatment is complete, ask the radiographer if you are needed for any other appointments within the department. If not, you are free to leave and continue your day.

Side effects

Radiotherapy can cause side effects, during and after your course of treatment. The radiographers will ask you how you are feeling every day. Feel free to discuss any treatment related changes or concerns about side effects with them. Everyone reacts to radiotherapy differently, but you may begin to notice some or all of the following side effects during your second or third week of treatment.

Effects on the skin

Over time, the skin over the area that's being treated with radiotherapy may become red and itchy. The following advice will help to minimise skin reactions:

- Treat the area gently
- Avoid vigorous rubbing and instead pat skin dry with a soft towel
- Avoid very hot or very cold water when you wash
- Use your normal washing products – don't suddenly change brands or use a new product while you are having radiotherapy
- Moisturise sparingly with a moisturiser that you have used previously
- Wear loose fitting underwear made from natural fibres to allow air to circulate around the area

Effects on your bowels and back passage

They may become looser, more frequent or occasionally constipated. Your back passage (rectum) may become sore and irritated and you may notice some blood on wiping. If you use haemorrhoid products tell your radiographers as they may need to recommend an alternative.

Urinary effects

The frequency, urgency and flow of your urine may alter as the treatment progresses.

- You may experience a stinging or burning sensation similar to cystitis when you urinate. If this happens, let your radiographer know. You may be asked to provide a urine sample so that we can check for infection.
- Occasionally you may pass urine which appears cloudy or has blood in it. This is normal.
- As your treatment progresses, you may find you are urinating more at night time.

Tiredness (fatigue)

It's common to experience increased tiredness towards the end of treatment. We will encourage you to drink plenty of fluids, take part in light activity and exercise to help with this.

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.

After radiotherapy

Recovery after treatment varies from person to person. Treatment side effects will peak two weeks after your last radiotherapy treatment, and most side effects will then gradually settle over a couple of months. Continue to follow the advice you have been given during your treatment. If you have made any dietary changes you can gradually reverse them.

You will have a follow-up appointment with your doctor approximately six to eight weeks after you have finished your treatment. A week before this appointment you'll need to have a PSA test done. This can be arranged through your GP surgery or at your local hospital.

Frequently asked questions

- **Will I be radioactive?** You will not be radioactive and are safe to be around family and friends.
- **Can I swim?** We would normally encourage physical exercise however swimming in chlorinated water can dry your skin out further. This may increase the likelihood of a skin reaction.
- **After treatment, can I continue with my normal activities?** Yes you can within reason. If you 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 is quick and painless.
- **Can I miss treatments?** We would advise that you do not miss a treatment once you have started, however you may find gaps in your appointment schedule due to machine services or public holidays. The radiographers will work hard to minimise these gaps and you may on occasion be asked to attend on a weekend or public holiday.

Useful information

Parking

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

Patients having radiotherapy treatment are entitled to a discount on parking. You must remember to validate your ticket at the radiotherapy reception before paying at the parking machine.

Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre

The centre offers a range of services to support you and you family and carers. It is located on B level in the East Wing Courtyard at Southampton General Hospital. Opening hours are Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm. Drop-in sessions are available or you can book an appointment by calling **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 – Radiotherapy for prostate cancer:

www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/prostate-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy

Macmillan – Radiotherapy for early prostate cancer:

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/prostate-cancer/early-prostate-cancer/treating/radiotherapy/radiotherapy-explained/radiotherapy-for-early-prostate-cancer.html

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.