

Patient information factsheet

Radiotherapy to the skin

Your doctor has prescribed a course of superficial radiotherapy to the skin. This is a treatment that uses low-energy x-rays to destroy unhealthy cells. It only affects the area being treated and a small margin around it. Superficial radiotherapy is completely painless and should not make you feel unwell. Your course of treatment will be planned specifically for you and may consist of one or more treatment sessions.

This factsheet explains what to expect at your 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 radiotherapy treatment

At your first appointment, your doctor will use a pen to mark the area of your skin that needs to be treated. We will measure and photograph this area, and sometimes make a tracing. These records help us to make sure your treatment is accurate each day and can be useful at any follow-up appointments in the future.

If the treatment is to your face or scalp, we may also need to make you a plastic mask. This will rest on your face and will help the staff get you in the same position for every treatment. A lead cut-out may also be used, this helps shape the radiotherapy beam and will protect the surrounding skin. The Radiographers will explain this in more detail if it is necessary for your treatment.

Your radiotherapy treatment

In the treatment room, the radiographer will help you to get into the right position. During the treatment itself, you will be on your own in the room. The radiographers will be just outside and will watch you on a discreet closed circuit television all the time.

The radiographers will guide the radiotherapy machine which will be touching your skin. Try to keep as still as possible. The treatment can last for as little as a few seconds or up to a few minutes. You won't feel anything during the treatment.

Side effects

When you have your radiotherapy, you may find your skin in the treated area can become dry at first and then red and sore. You also may lose hair from the area being treated.

A scab will sometimes form in the area and this will eventually come away to leave new skin underneath. Side effects from your treatment will be at their worst around two weeks after your final radiotherapy session. During the treatment and while your skin is still sore, please follow the advice given to you by your treatment team. Avoid exposing your skin to strong sun or cold wind, and only use sun creams in the area once it is well healed.

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After your radiotherapy treatment

A few weeks after your treatment has finished you'll have an appointment with your consultant if you need one. This allows time for any soreness to heal.

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.
- **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 is 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. 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

British Association of Dermatologists – Radiotherapy for skin cancer:

www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets/radiotherapy-for-skin-cancer

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.