

Preparation for radiotherapy treatment to the female pelvis

Before your radiotherapy treatment begins, you will attend a planning CT scan appointment, as explained below.

You will be required to follow the advice in this factsheet to help prepare your bladder and bowels before the planning CT scan and then before each treatment session. Ideally, we would like you to follow this advice for at least two weeks before your scan, but if this is not possible please start as soon as you can.

If you would like more information or have any questions or concerns, please speak to a radiographer who will be pleased to advise you.

Why is preparation important?

The pelvic organs, including the bladder and bowel are closely related. The contents and size of your bladder and rectum (part of the large bowel where poo is stored before it leaves your body) can affect the position of the treatment area. The diagram below shows the normal position for the organs in the pelvic area and how close they are to each other.

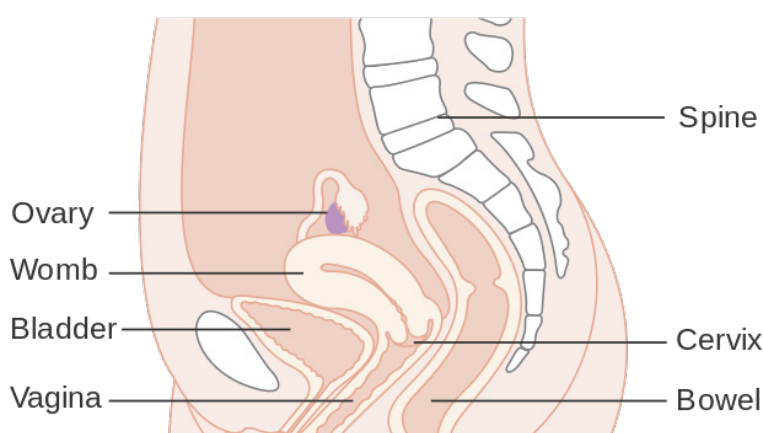


Image courtesy of CRUK

If the contents of your bladder and rectum vary between the day you have your planning CT scan and your treatment, it could mean the treatment area is in a different position to the one we have planned for.

Our advice aims to help you establish regular bowel movements and increase hydration so that:

- the contents of your rectum are consistent in size
- the build-up of intestinal gas is reduced
- the bladder is a consistent size (meaning there is less bladder and small bowel in the treatment area)
- the accuracy of your treatment is increased

This is important to reduce the risk of long-term bladder or bowel side effects.

How to prepare your bladder and bowels

Drink plenty of fluids – increase your daily intake by drinking at least two litres (about three pints) of water or squash, in addition to any hot drinks. Try having a glass of water with each meal and then sip throughout the day. Peppermint tea will help reduce wind.

Keep hydrated – drink extra fluids on hot days and after exercise. Drinking additional fluid helps to keep your bowels moving, so it's important to follow this advice every day; not just on the days you are having treatment. Make sure you drink enough on weekends and treatment-free days too.

Eat regularly – eat frequent meals. Skipping meals and not eating can lead to increased fullness of your rectum and increase wind in your bowels.

Avoid or reduce the amount of foods you eat that can cause wind or bloating such as:

- vegetables in the brassica family (cabbages, sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower)
- dried fruits (especially in muesli or similar cereals)
- high fat and greasy foods
- onions, lentils and beans (including baked beans)
- carbonated drinks (soft and alcoholic)
- very spicy foods
- no more than two pieces of fruit a day

Exercise regularly – gentle exercise such as walking and stretching can help move wind and regulate your bowel movements.

Avoid swallowing air when you eat:

- eat slowly and chew food well
- chew with your mouth closed
- avoid chewing gum
- sip drinks rather than gulping

Laxatives

Some laxatives may cause wind, so only use them if prescribed by a medical professional. If you are taking laxatives tell your radiographer.

On the day of your planning CT scan

- Have a light breakfast, but do not eat anything for two hours before your appointment.
- Remember to drink plenty of clear fluids.
- Try to have a bowel movement, without straining, before your appointment (we will ask you about this).
- You will be asked to empty your bladder (and bowel if you haven't already done so).

Filling your bladder before the scan

- We will explain your scan procedure and provide you with a measured jug of CT contrast (flavoured with squash) to drink. Contrast is a special dye that helps internal structures appear more clearly on the scan.
- You will be asked to drink all of the liquid within 10 minutes and then wait 20 minutes or more for your bladder to fill.
- You will then follow the same procedure to fill your bladder before each treatment (without the contrast).
- When your bladder feels comfortably full, the radiographers will take you in for your scan.
- We will check your bladder is full enough by using a bladder scanner, which is a non-invasive ultrasound machine.

If your rectum is too full or your bladder is not full enough, it won't be possible to complete the scan. We will advise you on what to do in order for us to repeat it later the same day.

If a second scan is not performed for some reason, we will discuss two options with you

- 1) You may be sent home with a mild laxative to take before coming back for a repeat scan.
- 2) You may be asked to use a mini enema (to clear the rectum of wind and poo) at home before coming back for a repeat scan.

At the end of your appointment we will let you know how much you need to drink (cups or ml), and over how long you need to drink it (mins), in preparation for each radiotherapy treatment.

Your first radiotherapy treatment appointment

Please arrive with enough time to fill your bladder ready for your appointment.

You should expect to be with us for at least two hours each day.

You can eat normally before your treatment.

Check in at reception and you will be directed to the waiting room. Take a seat and a radiographer will come and talk to you.

We will explain the treatment process and then ask you to follow the bladder filling instructions.

Drink all your required amount of water as instructed within the first 10 minutes. The remaining time allows your bladder to fill to the same size as for your planning CT scan.

Your daily treatment appointments

You will have a scan before each radiotherapy treatment. This will allow us to check the position of your bladder and bowel in relation to the treatment site.

If there is too much wind, your rectum is too full or there isn't enough fluid in your bladder, the treatment may not go ahead. If this is the case, we will advise you on what you need to do to enable us to proceed (for example, you may be asked to use a mini enema to clear the rectum).

If treatment does not go ahead on a particular day

If you are being treated for a bladder or bowel cancer, or a gynecological cancer (except cancer of the cervix), an extra appointment will be added to the end of your treatment schedule.

If you are being treated for cancer of the cervix or anal cancer this appointment will be added to an existing appointment day, with two treatments being given with a six hour gap. This saves you making an extra visit to the hospital.

Who to contact if you have questions

If you have any queries or require further information regarding your radiotherapy and preparation of your bowels or bladder, please contact Radiotherapy reception on **023 8120 8568**.

Visit www.uhs.nhs.uk and search for 'Welcome to radiotherapy' to download a factsheet containing useful information about your appointment, including our location and parking.

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