

Patient information factsheet

Radiotherapy to the brain

We have given you this factsheet because your doctor has referred you for radiotherapy treatment. Radiotherapy involves the use of high-energy radiation and is commonly used to treat cancer. 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. If you would like more information or have any concerns, please speak to a radiographer.

On the day of your treatment

When you arrive in the radiotherapy department, check in at reception and take a seat in the waiting area.

During your treatment

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 is important that you stay still.

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

Side effects

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

Effects on the skin

Over time, the skin in the treatment area may become red and itchy. You should:

- treat the area gently and avoid vigorous rubbing
- avoid very hot or very cold water while washing
- use your normal washing products (do not 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 instead)
- avoid applying any extra products
- wear a scarf or hat to protect the skin on your head (your skin will be more sensitive to weather conditions such as sun and wind)

Tiredness (fatigue)

You may find you are more tired as your treatment progresses. We would encourage you to drink plenty of fluids and do gentle exercise to reduce fatigue.

Headaches

You may have more headaches at the beginning of your treatment. You can take your usual painkillers for headaches (such as paracetamol and ibuprofen) unless you have been advised not to. Please 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. Hair loss is gradual. It usually starts two to three weeks into treatment but may continue after you finish your treatment.

Symptoms of hair loss can range from thinning of the hair to complete hair loss in the treatment area. For some people this may be permanent. Your doctor or radiographer will be able to discuss this with you. The radiographer can arrange an appointment in the Macmillan Centre for a wig fitting, at your request.

Other side effects

Very occasionally you may experience other side effects, such as:

- nausea (feeling sick)
- dizziness
- visual disturbances
- hearing disturbances

If you are concerned about any symptoms, please let the radiographers know.

Useful information

Steroids

You should continue to take any steroids you have been prescribed, unless your doctor advises you not to. Please make sure that 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, so it is safe for you to be around family and friends.

Can I swim?

While we encourage physical exercise, swimming in chlorinated water can dry your skin out further. This may cause a worse skin reaction.

Can I continue with my normal activities after treatment?

Yes. However, you may have to make adjustments if you start to feel tired or unwell.

Do I feel anything as the treatment is happening?

No, treatment 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 be asked to attend for treatment on a weekend or public holiday.

Parking

Blue car park is outside the oncology centre and 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**.

Contact us

If you have urgent symptoms relating to your current radiotherapy treatment, please call the **acute oncology service** at Southampton General Hospital on **023 8120 1345**.

This number is answered 24-hours, seven days a week. This number is for treatment-related symptoms only. It is **not** for general queries such as rearranging appointments or hospital transport.

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**.

For any non-urgent queries, please contact the radiotherapy reception.

Radiotherapy reception

Telephone: **023 8120 8568** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

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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:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/malignant-brain-tumour/>

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**