

Patient information factsheet

Radiotherapy to the lung

We have given you this factsheet because your doctors have recommended you have 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.

What to expect when you come for treatment

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

The radiographer may ask you to change into a hospital gown before you go into the treatment room. Changing facilities are available on every treatment machine.

During your treatment

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.

The radiographer will then put you into the correct 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.

Alongside your treatment, you may need to have blood tests or to see the doctor and/or a specialist radiographer on a regular basis. Please check this with a radiographer before leaving the department after treatment.

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. You can discuss any treatment related changes or concerns about side effects with them.

You may 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 treatment area may become red and itchy. You should:

- 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

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- use your normal washing products (do not change brands or use a new product while you are having radiotherapy)
- moisturise sparingly with a moisturiser that you have used previously (do not a zinc-based barrier cream such as Sudocrem)
- wear loose fitting clothes made from natural fibres that will not irritate your skin
- avoid exposing the area to the sun or cold wind

Oesophagitis

Your oesophagus (gullet) may become inflamed and sore after having radiotherapy treatment. You may feel as if you have a “lump” in your throat or a burning sensation in your chest. You may also find swallowing uncomfortable.

You can help to reduce discomfort when you eat by:

- eating slowly and cutting your food into smaller pieces
- eating smaller meals more frequently instead of three larger meals
- eating softer foods that are easier to swallow
- increasing your intake of fluid and drinking through a straw to make swallowing easier
- avoiding crunchy foods that are more difficult to swallow
- avoiding hot and spicy foods
- avoiding alcohol and tobacco

If you continue to experience discomfort, your doctor may give you medication to make swallowing much easier. You will be weighed weekly to make sure you are not losing weight, and a dietitian will see you regularly throughout your course of treatment.

Coughing and breathlessness

Radiotherapy may cause you to feel breathless. It can also aggravate any cough that you may already have. You may cough up blood or phlegm.

Tiredness (fatigue)

You may become more tired as your treatment progresses. Try to take a little light exercise and drink plenty of fluids to reduce your fatigue.

Frequently asked questions

Will I be radioactive?

You will not be radioactive, so you are safe 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 increase the likelihood of a skin reaction.

After treatment, can I continue with my normal activities?

Yes, within reason. You may have to make adjustments if you feel tired or unwell.

Will I feel anything as the treatment is happening?

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

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Useful information

Parking

Blue car park can be found outside the oncology centre, or by following signs to 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 your 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**.

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)

Useful links

Cancer Research UK – About radiotherapy for lung cancer:

www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/lung-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy/about-radiotherapy-for-lung-cancer

NHS Choices – Radiotherapy side effects:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Radiotherapy/Pages/Side-effects.aspx

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