

Patient information factsheet

Radiotherapy to the prostate or prostate bed

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.

On the day of your radiotherapy treatment

You should eat normally before your treatment.

We will ask you to arrive at a set time before your radiotherapy appointment. When you arrive at the radiotherapy department, check in at reception and take a seat in the waiting area.

It is important that your bladder is as comfortably full as it was when you came for your CT planning scan. This will make sure that the radiotherapy treatment is as accurate as possible. 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. A radiographer will 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.

We will ask you to undress and put on a hospital gown for your treatment. Please make sure you wear clothing and shoes that are quick and easy to loosen, such as slip-on shoes or sandals and trousers or shorts with an elasticated waist.

During your radiotherapy 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 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.

Before your treatment starts you will have a cone beam CT scan (CBCT). This allows us to check the position of your prostate for the treatment.

Treatment will not go ahead if:

- you have too much wind
- your rectum is too full
- there isn't enough fluid in your bladder

If this is the case, the radiographers will tell you what is needed for your treatment to go ahead. 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 not successful after the third attempt, the radiographers will discuss the next steps with you. This may include sending you home that day without treatment.

When your treatment is complete, please 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. Please discuss any treatment-related changes or concerns about side effects with them.

Everyone reacts to radiotherapy differently, but you may notice some or all of the following side effects during your second or third week of treatment. 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.

Effects on the skin

Over time, the skin in the treatment 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
- 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
- wear loose fitting underwear made from natural fibres to allow air to circulate around the area

Effects on your bowels and back passage (rectum)

You may notice that:

- your bowel movements become looser
- your bowel movements are more frequent
- you are occasionally constipated

Your back passage may become sore and irritated and you may notice some blood on wiping. Please tell your radiographers if you use haemorrhoid products, as they may need to recommend alternatives.

Urinary effects

You may find that:

- you are urinating more often
- you have the need to urinate urgently
- the flow of your urine is different

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You may also experience a stinging or burning sensation (similar to cystitis) when you urinate. If this happens, let your radiographer know. We may ask you 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 is common to experience increased tiredness towards the end of treatment. We will encourage you to drink plenty of fluids and to take part in light activity and exercise to help with this.

After your radiotherapy treatment

Recovery after radiotherapy treatment varies from person to person. Treatment side effects will peak two weeks after your last radiotherapy treatment, and most side effects will gradually settle over a couple of months. You should continue to follow the advice you have been given during your treatment.

If you have made any dietary changes, you can gradually reverse them.

Follow-up appointment

You will have a follow-up appointment with your doctor approximately six to eight weeks after you have finished your treatment. You will need to have a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test a week before this appointment. You can arrange this through your GP or at your local hospital.

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.

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.

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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 – 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

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