

## Patient information factsheet

# Radiotherapy to the prostate or prostate bed

We have given you this factsheet because you have been referred for radiotherapy treatment to your prostate or prostate bed. It explains what radiotherapy treatment is and what it involves, so you know what to expect at your appointments. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### What is radiotherapy treatment?

Radiotherapy is a treatment where high-energy radiation is used to kill cancer cells.

### Radiotherapy treatment overview

Your oncology consultant will have referred you for radiotherapy treatment.

A member of our radiotherapy team will contact you (via email, post or telephone) to invite you to a radiotherapy planning session.

We will also send you a factsheet explaining how to prepare your bladder and bowel for radiotherapy treatment.

You will then need to arrange to have a **prostate specific antigen (PSA) test** with your general practitioner (GP) before your planning CT scan.

You will have a planning CT scan.

We will create an individual treatment plan for you based on your planning CT scan results.

Your radiotherapy treatment will start (two to four weeks after your planning CT scan appointment).

Please note that:

- the length of your radiotherapy treatment will be specific to your individual needs.
- your radiotherapy treatment appointments may take place at one of the following locations:
  - Southampton General Hospital
  - Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital

Please see your appointment letter for specific details.

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## Preparing for your radiotherapy treatment

Please see the 'Preparing your bladder and bowel for radiotherapy to the prostate or prostate bed' factsheet for information about how to prepare for your planning CT scan and radiotherapy treatment appointments. It is important that you follow the advice in this factsheet for **at least two weeks before your planning CT scan** (if this is not possible, please start as soon as you can) **and continue until your final radiotherapy treatment appointment**.

We advise bringing **your own water bottle (a minimum size of 500ml)** to all your appointments, as this will make it easier to measure the water you need to drink when filling your bladder.

## Before your radiotherapy treatment

### Planning CT scan appointment

Before starting radiotherapy treatment, you will need to come to the hospital for a planning CT scan. This scan will help us to plan your radiotherapy treatment so that it is as accurate as possible. We will contact you before your appointment to explain what a planning CT scan involves and answer any questions you may have.

The planning CT scan can take **up to 45 minutes**, but **please allow two hours** for your appointment. You will be able to return to your normal daily activities straight after the scan.

On the day of your planning CT scan appointment, you should:

- eat and drink normally (unless we have told you that you need an injection of intravenous (IV) contrast, in which case, we will have given you separate advice about this)
- try to have a bowel movement (without straining)
- be prepared to be asked about your bowel habits

When you arrive for this appointment, we will explain the procedure to you and then ask you to empty your bladder (and bowels if you haven't already done so).

We will then give you a measured jug of water to drink and ask you to follow the instructions below:

1. When we tell you to, drink all the water within 10 minutes.
2. Wait for a total of 30 minutes to allow the water to fill your bladder. **Do not drink any more or empty your bladder during this time.**

We will then take you into the CT scanner room, where we will first perform a quick and painless procedure called a bladder ultrasound scan to check the volume of fluid in your bladder. This will involve us moving an ultrasound probe (a small device) over the skin of your tummy. Your bladder should be comfortable enough to hold for a further 20 minutes while we perform the planning CT scan. **However, if holding your bladder is making you feel uncomfortable or tense, please let us know.**

If either of the scans show that your bladder is not full enough, your bowel is too full or you have too much wind, we will not be able to proceed. If this is the case, we will advise what you need to do before we try again. Please note that we may need to rearrange your planning CT scan for another day.

**If your bladder is not full enough, we may ask you to:**

- drink more fluids during the day **or**
- increase the amount of water you drink to fill your bladder.

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## If your bowel is too full, we may ask you to:

- take a course of mild laxatives (a type of medicine that can help you empty your bowel) and then return a week later for the scan **or**
- use a micro-enema (a small bottle of fluid that you squeeze into your back passage via a small tube to help empty your bowel).

## If you have too much wind, we will advise you to:

- drink peppermint tea
- purchase wind-reducing preparations, such as peppermint oil capsules or an anti-flatulence medicine called simeticone (also known by the brand name 'Wind-eze')

### How to use a micro-enema

1. Take the micro-enema into the toilet.
2. Break or twist the end cap off.
3. Squeeze a little of the fluid onto your finger and smear over the tube.
4. Insert the full length of the tube into your back passage.
5. Gently squeeze the entire contents into your back passage.
6. Keep squeezing as you remove the tube from your back passage.
7. Throw the empty micro-enema bottle into the yellow stickered bin.
8. Wait, either in the toilet or in the waiting room, for 15 minutes.
9. Return to the toilet and try to empty your bowels. Please do not strain and do not worry if you cannot empty your bowels or if you only pass wind.
10. Let us know once you've been to the toilet and we will instruct you on when to start filling your bladder.



If your planning CT scan is successful, we will let you know how much you need to drink (ml) and the length of time you need to drink it over (minutes) before each of your upcoming radiotherapy treatment appointments.

### Your bladder filling requirements

\_\_\_\_\_ ml in \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

## On the day of your radiotherapy treatment

Please allow two hours for each radiotherapy treatment appointment. We recommend bringing in some snacks with you to have during this time, especially if your appointment falls over any of your normal mealtimes.

On the day of your radiotherapy treatment appointments, you should:

- eat and drink normally
- arrive 30 minutes before your appointment time in order to fill your bladder (see above)

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When you arrive at the radiotherapy department, check in at reception or use our self-check in monitor and take a seat in the waiting area for your treatment machine.

We will ask you to repeat the bladder filling process, exactly as you did for your planning CT scan appointment. This will make sure that the radiotherapy treatment is as accurate as possible. Please either bring in the correct amount of water in your own bottle or help yourself to water from the drinking fountain in our department. See your bladder filling requirements in the previous section for how much water you need to drink. We will tell you when to start drinking **(unless your appointment is before 9am, in which case, you will need to make sure you start drinking your water 30 minutes before your appointment time)**.

**If at any time you feel that you are struggling to hold your bladder, please tell us before we 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, we will ask you to confirm your name, date of birth and address (this will happen at each appointment). We will then carefully put you into the right position for the radiotherapy treatment.

Before your treatment starts, we may perform a bladder ultrasound scan to check your bladder volume. We will also perform a type of CT scan called a cone beam CT scan (CBCT). This is a quick and painless procedure that will allow us to check the position of your prostate for the treatment and the fullness of your bladder and back passage.

**We will not be able to continue with the treatment if either of the scans show:**

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

If this is the case, we will tell you what is needed for your treatment to go ahead. We will then repeat the CBCT scan up to three times. If the scan is not successful after the third attempt, we will discuss the next steps with you, which may involve sending you home that day without treatment.

If the CBCT scan is successful, we may make some final adjustments to make sure you are in the correct position before we begin the radiotherapy treatment. When the treatment starts, the linear accelerator or LINAC (radiotherapy machine) will move around you (but won't touch you), delivering the radiotherapy treatment. This will not hurt. It is important that you stay still while you receive the radiotherapy, as this will allow us to deliver your treatment accurately. You will be able to breathe normally while you receive the treatment.

After your treatment, you will be able to return to your normal daily activities straight away.

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We will arrange for you to have an appointment with a specialist radiographer. This will usually be towards the end of your treatment (but if it needs to be earlier, we will arrange this for you). At this appointment, you will be able to discuss how you are coping with the treatment and seek support for any side effects that are troubling you.

## Side effects

Radiotherapy can cause side effects during and after your course of treatment. We will ask you how you are feeling at each appointment. If you have any concerns about treatment-related changes or side effects, please discuss these with us. We will be able to offer advice or reassurance and suggest ways to help you cope.

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

### Effects on your bowels and back passage

- Looser or more frequent bowel movements
- Swelling in your back passage which may be uncomfortable when opening your bowels
- Feeling constipated
- Mucous when opening your bowels
- Small amounts of fresh red blood when opening your bowels
- Increased wind

Please tell us if you use haemorrhoid (piles) products, as you may need to use an alternative product while having radiotherapy treatment.

### Urinary effects

- Urinating more often or more urgently
- The flow of your urine is different
- Increased night time urination
- A stinging or burning sensation when urinating (known as radiation cystitis)
- Changes to your urine (may appear cloudy or with a hint of blood)

If you experience any of these side effects, let us know. We may ask you to provide a urine sample so that we can check this for infection. This is normal.

### Tiredness (fatigue)

It is common to experience increased tiredness towards the end of radiotherapy treatment. We will encourage you to drink plenty of fluids and to take part in light activity and exercise to help with this. Pacing your activities will help to manage your energy levels.

### Effects on your skin

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

- treat the area gently
- avoid vigorous rubbing and instead pat your 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

## 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 appointment, and most side effects will gradually settle over a couple of months. You should continue to follow the advice we have given you during your treatment to manage your side effects. However, if you have made any dietary changes, you can gradually start to reverse them.

## Follow-up appointment

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

## Long-term side effects

Some people may experience long-term side effects from radiotherapy treatment approximately 18 months to two years after completing the treatment. Long-term side effects can include:

### Sexual side effects

- Infertility (when a couple cannot get pregnant)
- Changes in your ejaculate (your semen may be blood-stained or you may not produce any semen)

### Urinary side effects

- Changes in frequency and urgency
- Radiation cystitis or pain on urination
- A urinary stricture (scarring that narrows the tube that carries urine out of your body)
- Incomplete emptying of your bladder
- Urinary incontinence (the unintentional passing of urine)

### Bowel side effects

- Changes in frequency and urgency
- Stool looseness
- Inflammation of your back passage

Please contact your urology clinical nurse specialist for advice if you experience any of the long-term side effects above.

## 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.



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## 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. We will work hard to minimise these gaps, and we may ask you to attend on a weekend or public holiday.

## Useful information

### Parking

- Southampton General Hospital:
  - 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.
  - People having radiotherapy treatment are entitled to a discount on parking. You must remember to validate your ticket at our radiotherapy reception before paying at the parking machine.
- Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital: Parking is free and can be found directly outside of the radiotherapy unit.

## Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre (Southampton)

A peaceful, welcoming and confidential space for people affected by cancer. You can come in to relax or take up the services on offer. The centre is located on B level at Southampton General Hospital.

Telephone: **023 8120 6037** (Monday to Thursday, 10am to 4pm)

Email: [macmillancentre@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:macmillancentre@uhs.nhs.uk)

Website: [www.uhs.nhs.uk/departments/cancer/living-with-cancerinformation-and-support/macmillan-cancer-information-and-support-centre](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/departments/cancer/living-with-cancerinformation-and-support/macmillan-cancer-information-and-support-centre)

## Maggie's (Southampton)

Maggie's is a charity that provides free cancer support and information in centres across the UK and online.

Telephone: **023 8212 4549** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Email: [southampton@maggies.org](mailto:southampton@maggies.org)

Website: [www.maggies.org/our-centres/maggies-southampton](http://www.maggies.org/our-centres/maggies-southampton)

## The Ark Cancer Charity Wellbeing Centre (Basingstoke)

A charity-funded wellbeing centre that offers support to people affected by cancer. The centre is located at Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital.

Telephone: **01256 360419** (Monday to Friday, 7am to 6pm)

Email: [info@arkcancercharity.org.uk](mailto:info@arkcancercharity.org.uk)

Website: [www.arkcancercharity.org.uk](http://www.arkcancercharity.org.uk)

## Contact us

If you are struggling with your radiotherapy side effects, we can organise a conversation with the urology site specialist **or** speak to your radiographer team when you attend for treatment.

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

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## Radiotherapy reception

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

If you have urgent symptoms relating to your current radiotherapy treatment, please call the **acute oncology service** at:

- Southampton General Hospital: **023 8120 1345**
- Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital: **07920 210289**

Both the **acute oncology service** numbers are answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This service 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 a member of our team when you attend for your radiotherapy treatment.

In an emergency, call **999**.

## Useful links

### Cancer Research UK

[www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer)

[www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy/side-effects/general/mens-sex-life-and-fertility](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy/side-effects/general/mens-sex-life-and-fertility)

### Macmillan

[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatments-and-drugs/radiotherapy-for-prostate-cancer](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatments-and-drugs/radiotherapy-for-prostate-cancer)

### Prostate Cancer UK (information for men or trans women)

[www.prostatecanceruk.org](http://www.prostatecanceruk.org)

### NHS

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/prostate-cancer/treatment](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/prostate-cancer/treatment)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/ct-scan](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ct-scan)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/prostate-cancer/psa-testing](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/prostate-cancer/psa-testing)

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