

# Radiotherapy for cancer of the abdomen

Oncology and Clinical Haematology

## Introduction

Your Oncologist (Radiotherapy Doctor) or Consultant Radiographer has offered you radiotherapy to the abdomen area. This can include cancers of the stomach, pancreas, kidney, lymph glands, liver, gall bladder and spleen. This leaflet has been written to explain about the radiotherapy treatment and to answer some of the questions you might have.

## What is radiotherapy treatment?

Radiotherapy is the treatment of cancer with measured doses of radiation. The treatment does not make you radioactive and you are safe to be with other people. It is often given in small doses over a specified period of days or weeks, but may be given in a single treatment. It is given by Therapeutic Radiographers who operate the machines which direct high-energy rays to the precise area needing treatment. The Radiographers are specially trained professional men and women. They will be able to answer any questions or concerns you may have.



## Taking your consent

It is important that you understand all about your treatment. You will be provided with the information you need before consenting to treatment such as:

- The benefits of the treatment
- The risks of the treatment
- Other treatments available
- What the treatment involves and how long it will take
- How you feel during and after treatment

**The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.**

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

- The side effects that you may experience

It is important to ask any questions regarding your treatment before consenting. However there will be further opportunities to discuss any concerns you may have before the radiotherapy treatment starts.

You will be asked to confirm your consent to radiotherapy on your first day of treatment.

## What about my medicines?

Please tell the Radiographers about any tablets or medicines you take and remember to bring all your medicines with you on your first visit. We will be able to tell you if you need to change how you take your medicine.

## Important Message for Ladies

Radiotherapy will cause harm to an unborn child. Please tell us if you have missed a period or think you may be pregnant. It is important that you do not become pregnant throughout the treatment process; your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer must discuss this with you. You will be asked to confirm that you are not pregnant at various stages of the radiotherapy process.

## What are the benefits to having radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy aims to do one of two things. Either, destroy cancer cells in the area being treated or help to reduce any symptoms you may have from your cancer. Your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer will discuss which applies to you. Radiation has an effect on both normal and cancer cells. However its effect is greater on cancer cells. Normal healthy cells can repair themselves more effectively and any damage to them is usually temporary.

## When will I get my appointment for radiotherapy preparation?

If you are not given an appointment when you consent to radiotherapy, a booking Coordinator will call you with an appointment for your first visit. This is called a computerized tomography (CT) planning scan appointment, and should be booked 1-2 weeks after your first meeting with your Radiotherapy Doctor.

## Why is there a delay before starting radiotherapy treatment?

How soon the planning stage of your treatment will begin depends on the reason for your radiotherapy. Your first appointment to plan the treatment may be a few days or weeks after you first saw your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer. When radiotherapy is part of a combined treatment plan (with surgery or chemotherapy), you may be given dates for your radiotherapy some time ahead.

## What happens during my treatment planning?

Treatment planning will be done using a computerized tomography (CT) scanner, and the scans will be used to give enough information to allow the radiotherapy treatment to be planned accurately. The scans that are taken are not used to assess the cancer.

The appointment can take approximately 30 minutes. To help with treatment planning you may be asked to arrive with an empty stomach. You will be advised on this prior to your first visit. If you have not been asked to arrive with an empty stomach please eat and drink as normal on the day of your CT visit.

In the scanner you will be asked to lie on your back with a support under your head and knees. This is the position you will be in for all of your radiotherapy treatment. We may use additional equipment to help to position you for treatment, it is important that this is comfortable for you to manage for each daily treatment lasting approximately 15 minutes.

After the scan the Radiographers will ask permission to make some permanent skin dots, called tattoos, which are the size of a small freckle. The tattoos do not indicate the position of the treatment or the cancer. These tattoos are used to ensure that you lie in the same, correct position each day. If you decide that you do not wish to have these tattoos, then please discuss with the Radiographers at the time.



## The use of contrast during your treatment planning

In addition to the scan, your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer may also request a procedure in which the Radiographers inject some dye into your blood stream. This involved inserting a needle into a vein in your arm or wrist through which dye is administered during the scan. This is so that the structures show clearly on the scan, aiding the of planning your treatment.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire with the Radiographer before the procedure, and you may also be asked to have a blood test. This is to make sure that it is appropriate for the Radiographers to administer the dye. If you are aware of any reasons why you are not suitable to have this procedure, please inform your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer or the scanning radiographers. This procedure is only carried out during the scan and will not be used when you have your treatment.

## Possible side effects from contrast

As the contrast is injected, you may feel a little warm. It is not uncommon to have a metallic-like taste in your mouth. Many patients also feel as if their bladder is very full. These are all normal reactions. However, if you begin to feel nauseous, dizzy, breathless or faint you will be asked to stay in the department after the scan for approximately 15 mins to monitor for any side effects.

## How will I get to the hospital?

You will be asked regarding your travel arrangements for treatment and preference for the time of your treatment appointments. We can consider your requests, however we cannot always guarantee a specific time each day.

Many patients are able to bring themselves for treatment. However if you require hospital transport, you will be given information on how to arrange this. There is not space for friends and family to travel with you in the ambulance / hospital car unless you have a medical reason for needing an escort.

A local support group in the Dudley area may also be able to provide transport, and the Radiographers will give you information on this also. Car Park P4 is the nearest to the Deanesly Centre and there are disabled parking spaces near the entrance.

There can be delays for some time either side of your appointment because of the high demand for transport. Please take this into account when you are deciding whether to use ambulance transport or not.

## When will I get my treatment appointment?

There will be a few weeks before the radiotherapy treatment starts. You will normally be contacted by telephone to inform you of your start date. Due to the planning process, you may only be given a day or two notice of when the treatment will start. Please ensure that you give the correct contact details so we are able to contact you easily.

## Can I choose my appointment time?

The treatment units treat lots of patients during the day. We cannot always promise you the exact time every day. You will be asked at your CT appointment your preference of time, which will be considered when we book your treatment appointments. Please give us plenty of warning if you have specific time requests.

## How often do I need to come for treatment?

Your treatment is individual and designed for you. Your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer will discuss with you the total number of treatments that you need and how often you will need to attend the department.

The centre is open Monday to Friday each week. Most patients are treated once on each day of the week.

## What happens when I have radiotherapy treatment?

When you arrive for your treatment please check in at the reception desk. They will let the Radiographers know you have arrived. You may find that you are not called for treatment in the order that you arrived in the department. This is because we have different treatment machines for different radiotherapy treatments.

**We will always try to keep to your appointment time however please be aware there may be delays. The staff will inform you if there is a delay for your appointment.**

Prior to your first appointment you will be advised on any pre-treatment preparation regarding your bladder and bowel.

A Radiographer will also discuss the treatment and how to minimise the side effects. They will also check that you are still happy to go ahead with treatment. This is the time to ask any remaining questions or discuss any concerns you may have, even if they seem like silly questions.

You will be collected from the waiting room and taken to the treatment room when it is your treatment time and asked to change into a gown to wear when you are in the treatment room. The Radiographers will position you on the treatment couch. The couch is raised so it is closer to the radiotherapy machine. The Radiographers will dim the room lights so that they can see the laser lights. They will then move you to line up your tattoos to place you into the correct position for treatment.

When you are in the correct position the radiotherapy machine will move around you, parts of the machine may come close to you and even touch you, but at no time will you feel any pain or pressure. The Radiographers will inform you when they are leaving the room to start the treatment.

During your treatment you will be alone in the room; however the Radiographers operate the machine from the control area which is close by and will watch you on closed circuit television. If you are in any distress please raise your arm or call out, whichever is most suitable, and the treatment can be stopped. For your own safety, please do not try to get off the couch as it is raised up off the floor.

For some treatments the Radiographers may move the machine around you to perform a quick scan or X-ray. This allows them to look at more pictures to ensure you are in the correct position. These pictures cannot be used to assess your response to radiotherapy.

There is nothing to feel and nothing to see during treatment. The machine makes a buzzing noise when it is giving treatment. When the treatment has finished please remain in position until the Radiographers enter the room and tell you everything is finished.

On average your appointment will last approximately 20 minutes however it may take longer at the beginning of your treatment or if a scan or X-ray is required.

## Important advice during treatment

It is very important that you come for all your treatment appointments. Any missed treatments have the potential to reduce the success of radiotherapy. If for any reason you are unable to come for treatment, please inform us at the earliest opportunity. We may be able to make suggestions so that you can still come or will arrange for you to make up for missing the treatment.

## What are the risks / side effects of radiotherapy?

There are nearly always risks/side effects to any treatment. Radiotherapy destroys cancer cells but can also temporarily affect healthy cells in the area of your body being treated.

## General Side Effects

Please be aware that if you smoke or drink alcohol the side effects of treatment will be more severe. It is advisable to cut back or stop smoking and drinking altogether. If you feel you need support in doing this please talk to the Radiographers.

**Tiredness and fatigue:** Tiredness can be a general side effect of treatment and travelling for treatment every day. A small number of patients describe feelings of extreme fatigue but most are able to continue with normal routines, and some continue to work.

People who have had chemotherapy before radiotherapy may notice the tiredness earlier because of the lasting effects of the chemotherapy. Try to rest when you can. Sometimes a small amount of gentle exercise can help.

The tiredness can continue after your treatment has finished and may last for a couple of months after.

**Skin reactions:** You may experience some skin reactions during and after treatment, please refer to the Skincare leaflet for further advice.

**Loss of appetite:** Some people find that radiotherapy may change their appetite. We can arrange for you to see a Dietician if this applies to you. Eating little and often can help. If you are eating less than normal it is important to increase the calorie and protein content of any meal, these are suggestions which may help.

Full fat milk	Butter or margarine
Cream	Oil
Full fat yoghurt	Mayonnaise or salad cream
Ice cream	Evaporated milk
Cheese	

**Nausea:** Your Doctor or Consultant Radiographer will be able to give you anti-sickness tablets if this applies to you.

### Site related side effects:

**Bowel Symptoms:** You may develop diarrhoea during treatment which can last for several weeks afterwards. Some patients pass mucus (clear jelly like fluid) in addition to the diarrhoea. You may also experience an urgent need to open your bowels, increased 'wind' or abdominal cramps. It is important to keep eating and drinking as normally as possible, however you may need to adjust your diet to help with any bowel symptoms. Please ask the Radiographers for information on how best to do this.

You may have some spotting of blood or bleeding with bowel movements which can last for a few months, please do not worry, this is not uncommon.

**Bowel obstruction:** A rare complication is bowel obstruction. Bowel obstruction is defined as “the partial or complete narrowing of the bowel”. Radiotherapy can cause an obstruction as a result of inflammation (soreness) of the bowel. The risk of developing an obstruction is present while you are receiving radiotherapy, and for a few weeks after completion of treatment, until the side effects affecting the bowel have settled. The signs of bowel obstruction are as follows, and occur at the same time: nausea and vomiting (feeling and being sick), constipation (lack, or reduced number, of bowel movements) and severe pain in the abdomen.

**Late or permanent reactions:** It is possible that some types of reactions may occur after the treatment has finished. Your Doctor will discuss any possible late side effects at the time of consent and a Radiographer will go through all side effects relating to your own individual treatment on your last day of treatment.

## What are the alternatives to radiotherapy?

Your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer will be able to discuss what might happen if you decide not to have radiotherapy treatment. They will also be able to discuss any other treatment choices you might consider.

## Some questions you may have

### Can I carry on working?

You may carry on working during treatment if you wish to, as long as your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer agrees. Please ask if you need advice.

### What will happen after my treatment has finished?

Once you have completed your treatment your side effects may continue for 2-3 weeks and in some cases even worsen. It is important to continue with the advice that was given to you during your radiotherapy until the side effects minimise.

### When can I go on holiday?

We do not recommend that you book a holiday for at least 6-8 weeks after the radiotherapy has finished, please make sure you feel well enough to enjoy it and to check with your Oncologist or Consultant Radiographer before booking.

### What should I do if I have any questions or concerns?

When treatment has ended please do not hesitate to contact the Radiographers or Specialist Nurses for advice if you have any questions or worries about your treatment or recovery. The telephone numbers you need are included at the back of this leaflet.

### What about follow up appointments?

You will either make a radiotherapy follow-up appointment on your last treatment day, or this will be sent in the post, this is normally 6-12 weeks after your treatment has ended. Your appointment may be in the outpatient department at the Deanesly Centre or at a hospital nearer to where you live.

## Further advice to help during and after your treatment

### Skin care

During treatment and up to 2 weeks after treatment has finished it is advisable to wash gently with warm water and pat the skin dry with a soft towel. More information regarding this can be found in the skincare leaflet.

If your skin becomes blistered or broken during treatment, the radiotherapy team will monitor this and advise accordingly. If skin reactions occur after treatment has finished contact the hospital for advice but you should still continue to follow the post treatment advice given.

During treatment it is advisable to wear loose fitting comfortable clothes next to the treated area.

Keep the area being treated away from direct sunlight and heat such as sun lamps or hair-dryers. Remember your skin will become sensitive so extra care will be needed to look after it.

## Nutritional advice

It is important to keep your weight stable leading up to and during your treatment. Eating small and frequent meals throughout the day will help.

A Dietician will be available to give advice with problems such as difficulty swallowing, nausea or lack of appetite.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids during your treatment to stay hydrated.

Try to avoid very hot food and drink, allow food to cool slightly before eating and drinking and avoid spicy foods. Cool soft foods can help if your side effects are related to swallowing.

You may need nutritional supplement drinks if you are losing weight, having difficulty swallowing or not eating well due to lack of appetite or nausea. Please speak to a Radiographer if you feel you are losing weight or struggling to eat.

## Useful telephone numbers

Deanesly Reception Desk – **01902 694054**

Monday to Friday – 9:00am – 5:00pm

Oncology / Haematology 24 hour Patient Helpline - **07920 587 036**

### **Macmillan Support and Information Centre**

You can find us on the main hospital corridor in New Cross Hospital or visit our website address below.

Telephone: **01902 695234**

**[www.cancercarewolverhampton.nhs.uk](http://www.cancercarewolverhampton.nhs.uk)**

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

For more information on radiotherapy or to order your free booklet called 'Understanding Radiotherapy' ring Macmillan Cancer Support on

89 Albert Embankment

London

SE1 7UQ

Freephone **0808 808 0000**

**[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation/cancertypes/brainsecondary](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation/cancertypes/brainsecondary)**

This is a national charity, providing care and support for people living with cancer. Financial help may be available to some cancer patients.

### **Cancer Research UK**

PO Box 123

London

WC2A 3PX

Freephone **0800 226 237**

**[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)**

## English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

## Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

## Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

## Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

## Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

## Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。