

Internal Radiotherapy (Vault Brachytherapy)

Oncology and Clinical Haematology

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.

Introduction

Your Radiotherapy Doctor has offered you Internal Radiotherapy (brachytherapy treatment). This leaflet has been written to explain about the radiotherapy treatment and to answer some of the questions you might have.

What is Internal Radiotherapy Treatment?

Internal Radiotherapy is also called brachytherapy treatment.

An applicator is inserted into the vagina. The brachytherapy machine feeds a radioactive source (a thin radioactive wire) into the applicator and this remains in the tube during treatment.

The treatment is administered by Therapeutic Radiographers who are specially trained professionals. They will be able to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

How does Internal Radiotherapy work?

Internal Radiotherapy can be given alongside other treatments. Its aim is to destroy all the cancer cells in the area being targeted. 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.

The choice of treatment will be made together with your Doctor; this will be based on the risks and benefits of the treatment and your own individual circumstances.

What can I expect before treatment starts?

You will be required to attend a pre-assessment clinic, in preparation for your insertion. You will be shown the room in which treatment will take place and the treatment will be explained to you in full.

Consent and agreeing to treatment

We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand.

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 may feel during and after treatment
- 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. Please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

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

What are the benefits of Internal Radiotherapy Treatment?

The aim of this treatment is to destroy all the cancer cells in the area being treated.

Are there any risks or side effects to having Internal Radiotherapy?

There are nearly always 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.

Site related side effects

Bladder symptoms

Your bladder will be irritated by the radiotherapy treatment causing you to pass urine more frequently, perhaps with burning. You may also feel an urgent need to pass urine. Drinking plenty of clear fluids and avoiding tea, coffee and alcohol can help. Some people find a glass of cranberry juice a day helpful; however you should not drink cranberry juice if you are taking anti-coagulants. If the burning persists, you may need a course of antibiotics.

The symptoms progress through the course of treatment and for a few weeks after; most patients feel back to normal six weeks after treatment.

You may notice some blood in your urine. Do not be alarmed; in most cases this settles within a month of finishing your treatment.

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.

Hardening and shrinkage (stenosis) of the vagina

In order to reduce the risk you will need to use vaginal dilators. You will be supplied with these and taught how to use them. This will increase your physical comfort whether or not you are sexually active. You will be given a contact number for the Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist along with an appointment for approximately six weeks. Your Clinical Nurse Specialist is contactable at any time if you have any concerns. You can continue with normal sexual relations unless advised otherwise.

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 would happen if I decided not to have radiotherapy, and are there any alternatives?

Your radiotherapy doctor 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.

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.

What does the treatment involve?

Your Doctor or Specialist radiographer will examine you to determine which applicator will be the correct size for you. This all takes place in the private treatment room.

The sterile applicator is inserted into the vagina, the applicator is secured and you will need to keep very still, a tube is then used to attach the applicator to the treatment machine.

When the machine is switched on a small radioactive source travels into the applicator. The source returns to the machine as soon as the treatment is complete.

You will need to be in the treatment room on your own during the treatment process. The treatment team will be watching on closed circuit television and will be able to hear and speak to you via the intercom.

Will the procedure be painful?

Although having the applicators inserted has been described as uncomfortable, most patients do not find the procedure painful. The treatment itself is completely painless.

How long does it take?

To deliver the treatment takes approximately 5-15 minutes. The whole procedure including all the preparation takes about 30-45 minutes.

Once the treatment has finished the treatment team will remove your applicator, this should not be painful. Your Doctor will discuss the number of treatments needed; this is normally two to three. This is determined on whether you will be having other treatment prior to the Internal Radiotherapy.

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 or 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.

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 Radiotherapy Doctor 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 Consultant 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 continue to follow the post treatment advice already 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 hairdryers. 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.

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.

Useful telephone numbers

Monday to Friday – 9:00am to 5:00pm

Deanesly Reception Desk – 01902 694054

Brachytherapy Team mobile – 07825 781820

**Oncology/Haematology 24 hour Patient Helpline Number –
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

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/

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

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。