

Radiotherapy to the prostate

i Information for patients
Weston Park Cancer Centre



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SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



Information for patients having radiotherapy to the prostate or prostate bed

Your name:

Treatment unit:

Phone number:

You will have treatments

General information

This leaflet is for people who have been recommended to have radiotherapy to the prostate or prostate bed.

The information and advice in this leaflet can help you to manage or reduce the side effects of radiotherapy. It is only intended to be a guide as side effects will vary from person to person.

The radiographers will discuss the information in this booklet with you on your first day of treatment. We will ensure that the information we give you is relevant to your individual course of treatment.

Appointment times

Patients attend the radiotherapy department from across a wide area, so the department does experience very busy periods throughout the year. The appointment time on your appointment list is the time that you will be having your radiotherapy treatment, and it is important to note that your times can vary from day to day.

We do try and accommodate your appointment time requests but this is not always possible due to the number of people attending the department. Often it is not possible to ensure that you are on the same treatment machine for each treatment and at the same time.

Like treatment machines, doctor and radiographer clinic appointments can often be delayed due to various issues. A member of staff will try and ensure that you are told about any delays. Please do expect to be in the department longer on your review days.

In the event of appointment delays due to patient volume or regular maintenance for the machines, the radiographers will ensure they do their best to treat you at your appointment time. In the event of delays, they will either move you to another machine, or let you know how long the delay will be.

Occasionally due to maintenance you may have a short break in your radiotherapy. This will not affect you in any way. We do ask that you avoid missing any scheduled treatments unnecessarily.

Reviewing your treatment

You will be monitored by the treatment radiographers and seen by your doctor, or one of the review radiographers, during your course of treatment.

You will have weekly reviews scheduled and these are listed on your appointment list as 'review'. On these days you will have your radiotherapy treatment as well as a review in the clinic.

This review is to assess how you are feeling and if you have any treatment side effects. Please make sure you tell your doctor or their team of any side effects that you are having.

If you need any repeat medications that you have been given by your Weston Park Hospital consultant, it is a good idea to mention it during your clinic review. A list of current medication may be useful to bring to these treatment reviews.

If you have problems or questions at any time, please speak to a radiographer who will be happy to help.

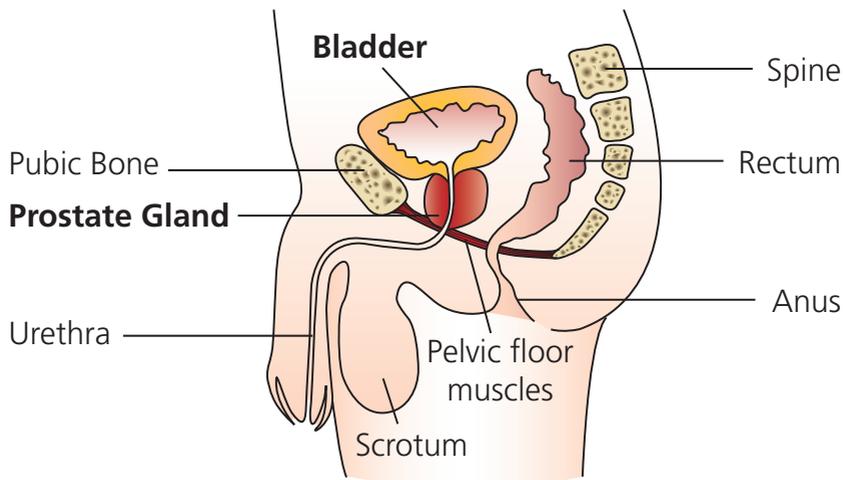
Transport and parking

Hospital transport can be requested but this has to be authorised by the oncology team if they deem appropriate and you have additional medical needs.

We appreciate that hospital car parking can be an issue and understand that you may run late due to parking and traffic. If possible and safe to do so, please can you inform us on the following number if you are running late **0114 226 5290**.

Preparation for Radiotherapy Treatment

The prostate, bladder and rectum are very close together within the pelvis (see diagram below).



The contents and size of your bladder and rectum can affect the position of your prostate or prostate bed.

We would therefore like you to have a full bladder and an empty rectum (back passage) when you have your CT planning scan and radiotherapy treatment.

Approximately 45 minutes before your appointment time, the radiographers will advise you to empty your bladder and then drink a set amount of water within 10 to 15 minutes.

You will need to hold this water in your bladder until after your treatment, which could be up to 1 hour in total.

This filling of your bladder will mean your bladder is pushed away from the area we are treating. This means there is less bladder and bowel in

the treatment area, which will increase the accuracy of your treatment and minimise the risk of treatment side effects.

If you are struggling to hold the water in your bladder, it is important that you speak to the radiographers and let them know.

Please do not go to the toilet without discussing this with the radiographers.

Staying well hydrated

Hydration throughout your treatment is important. You must be well hydrated before drinking the water for your CT planning scan and radiotherapy treatment, or your bladder will not be full enough.

You are advised to increase your water intake whilst undergoing treatment. Try to drink 8 glasses (or 2 litres) of water a day. This can be plain water or dilute drinks. You may have the occasional tea or coffee but have a glass of water as well.

The hydration diary provided may help you to monitor your hydration levels and help you identify when you need to increase your fluid intake. You may also discuss your hydration diary with the radiographers during your treatment.

Pre-scan and treatment medication

You may have been given some medication to use before your CT planning scan and before each of your radiotherapy treatments. This is to empty your rectum.

Due to the close proximity of the rectum to the prostate/prostate bed, if your rectum is full the position of your prostate or prostate bed can be changed. The radiographers may encourage you to take medication to help ease gas/wind within your bowels. Again, this is because gas/wind will change the position of your prostate or prostate bed.

General health care

You are advised to continue to eat a nutritionally well balanced diet, and continue to eat as normal.

It is important to eat frequent meals which help keep your bowels moving. Skipping meals and not eating can lead to increased fullness of your rectum and can increase the wind in your bowels.

During your treatment the radiographers may offer further advice to you.

If you are diabetic, please ensure you bring your insulin and some food each time you attend the hospital, in case there are delays.

If you are taking prescription tablets or medications, carry on doing so unless you are advised to stop by the doctor or one of the radiographers. Always make sure you have an adequate supply of medication.

Smoking

We strongly advise that you stop smoking completely. Smoking can make the radiotherapy reaction worse and prolong recovery time.

If you would like help with this, please speak to one of the radiographers or Yorkshire Smokefree, which can be contacted on:

- **0800 612 0011** (free from a landline)
- **0330 660 1166** (free from most mobiles)
- **<http://sheffield.yorkshiresmokefree.nhs.uk/>**

Radiotherapy side effects

Radiotherapy works as a build-up within your body. This means you may not notice any side effects for the first week or two, and side effects can differ from each person.

Treatment side effects during radiotherapy treatment are normal and temporary, so please do not worry.

If you notice any side effects during your treatment, please inform the radiographers on your treatment set, and mention it to the doctor or review radiographers on your review days. We can then advise and treat you accordingly.

Tiredness (Fatigue)

During your treatment you can feel more tired than usual, both during and after a course of radiotherapy. This can be partly caused by the treatment and the travelling involved with attending the hospital every day.

This may continue for a few weeks after you have finished treatment. Try to rest and sleep when you feel the need. Gentle exercise can also help with this feeling of fatigue.

Urinary symptoms

The radiotherapy treatment can irritate the lining of your bladder. This can mean that you may experience some problems with your bladder.

These urinary problems may include the need to pass urine (pee) more often than normal. This can be during the day and at night.

You may already be experiencing this, but the treatment may make it worse. It may become more urgent to empty your bladder, so you have the feeling that you cannot hold on and need to get to the toilet quicker.

Your urine flow/stream may become reduced or slower. You may notice a stinging or burning sensation when you pass urine (cystitis).

It is important to drink plenty of water throughout the day. This will help dilute your urine so it stings less. It may also help to drink cranberry juice or barley water. **Do not drink cranberry juice if you are taking Warfarin.**

If you are struggling with your urinary symptoms, try to limit or avoid smoking, drinking alcohol and caffeinated drinks (tea or coffee) as these may make your urinary problems worse as they can irritate the bladder.

If you are struggling with needing the toilet, a public toilet map can be found at <https://www.toiletmap.org.uk/>

Bowels

As your rectum (back passage) sits very close to your prostate or prostate bed, it can be irritated by the radiotherapy treatment. This can lead to bowel cramps, loose and more frequent bowel movements, which may even be watery (diarrhoea). The diarrhoea may be mild or could be more troublesome.

If you were given medication to help empty your bowels, this may need to be stopped and you may be provided with a different medication to help control the diarrhoea. Please speak with the radiographers on your treatment unit and they will be able to offer advice.

When emptying your bowels you may notice some blood in the toilet bowl, on your toilet paper or in your stool (poo). This is caused by irritation in your back passage. This is quite normal, but do let a staff member know.

You can also experience discomfort from the back passage and may feel the urge to empty your bowels more frequently, but may not pass anything or empty only a small stool. You may also pass a clear jelly-like mucus from your rectum (back passage).

If you have piles (haemorrhoids), the treatment can irritate them further or cause them to come back if you have had them before. If this is a problem for you, Preparation H ointment can be used during your radiotherapy treatment.

Do not use other creams as they can contain chemicals that can irritate your skin.

Hair loss

You may lose some pubic hair in the treated area. This is usually temporary and should grow back after treatment. It may grow back thinner or for some people it may not regrow.

Sexual activity

It is fine to have sex during your radiotherapy treatment. You may find ejaculation uncomfortable and notice that you produce less semen during and after treatment.

You may also have a 'dry orgasm', where you feel the sensation of orgasm but don't ejaculate. This may feel different to the orgasms you're used to.

If you are experiencing side effects in your rectum that are causing you discomfort, it is advised that you should abstain from receiving anal sex, until these side effects have settled.

Looking after your skin

Sometimes radiotherapy may cause a skin reaction in the area being treated and make the skin more sensitive. This can be around the groin area and in-between the buttocks. This can happen during the treatment and for a few weeks afterwards. This can vary between individuals, but is usually a slight, mild reaction.

If you notice a skin reaction, we advise that you:

- Bath and shower as normal, but use warm water rather than hot and be gentle with your skin in the area being treated.
- Use a moisturiser sparingly on your skin being treated, and let it soak into the skin. Please stop using it if it irritates your skin and talk to the treatment team.
- Choose a moisturiser that does not contain sodium lauryl sulphate
- Do not wipe moisturiser off before treatment

If a more severe skin reaction happens, please seek further advice from the radiographers on your treatment unit.

To help your skin you can:

- Wash the skin carefully with soap and water, gently pat dry
- Wear loose fitting, natural fibre clothing next to the skin
- Avoid rubbing the area
- Avoid sun exposure and protect the treatment area from direct sunlight. In the future, if exposing the pelvis and area treated to the sun, use a UVB sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 and UVA protection as your skin in the treatment area will be more sensitive.
- Avoid extremes of temperatures such as heating and cooling pads
- Avoid sticky tape on the area (such as plasters)
- If toilet paper irritates you, use un-perfumed baby wipes

What can affect my skin reaction?

Having treatment to areas where the skin folds can make your skin reaction worse. This includes the groin and buttocks which can be warm, moist and can rub together. A skin reaction is more likely if you are overweight and so have more skin folds.

Additional help and advice

We can arrange contact with the following if needed:

- Dietitian
- District nurse
- Macmillan nurse
- Specialist nurse counsellor
- Social worker/benefits adviser

If you are worried about any of the aspects of the radiotherapy or its side effects, please speak to the radiographers on your treatment unit or the nurses if you are on the ward.

There are information stands around the department and you and your relatives are welcome to take any information you might find useful.

The information and support office in our reception areas also has a selection of resources and our information and support radiographers are based here. They are available to provide additional information for radiotherapy patients, their relatives, friends and carers. The office is open Monday to Friday, 8.00am - 5.00pm. If no one is available you can leave your contact details with reception and someone will get back to you as soon as possible. Alternatively, you can contact the Radiotherapy Information and Support Team on:

- **0114 226 5282**
- **sth.rtinfo@nhs.net**

On completion of radiotherapy

Once you have completed your radiotherapy treatment, the side effects may continue for a few weeks even though you are no longer receiving treatment. Continue with the advice that was given to you during your radiotherapy until the side effects stop.

At the end of your treatment the radiographers will provide further advice and contact telephone numbers. You will receive a follow up appointment either to be seen in an outpatient clinic or be contacted by telephone. This appointment will be 6 to 12 weeks after completion of the radiotherapy treatment. By this time, the short term side effects of treatment should be settling down.

If you do not receive an appointment in the post within this time, please contact the radiotherapy department or the secretary of your doctor, and we will be able to check this for you.

We do not request a PSA (Prostate-Specific Antigen) blood test until at least 6 months after the radiotherapy.

What if I have any questions or concerns?

If you are worried about any aspect of radiotherapy or its side effects, please speak to the radiographers on your treatment unit or the nurses if you are staying on the ward.

If you have any questions or concerns when you are at home, you can call any of the numbers below:

The Radiotherapy Information and Support Team:

- **0114 226 5282**
- **sth.rtinfo@nhs.net**

Urology Advanced Clinical Practitioner Therapeutic Radiographers:

- **0114 226 5024**
Monday to Friday, 8.30am - 5.00pm

24-hour emergency contact number:

- **0114 226 8345** or **0114 271 2733**

Alternatively you can call your GP.

Other sources of help and support

This leaflet deals mainly with the physical aspects of your treatment, but your emotional wellbeing is just as important to us.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be deeply distressing for you and those closest to you. Here are some information and support services which may be helpful to you.

Weston Park Cancer Information and Support Centre:

- **0114 553 3330**

Rotherham Macmillan Cancer Information and Support:

- **01709 427 655**

Chesterfield Macmillan Information and Support:

- **01246 516406**
- **crhft.macmillaninfo@nhs.net**

Doncaster Macmillan Service:

- **01302 796853**

Macmillan Cancer Support:

- **0808 808 0000**
- **www.macmillan.org.uk**

Marie Curie Cancer Care:

- **www.mariecurie.org.uk**

Prostate Cancer UK:

- **0800 074 8383**
- **www.prostatecanceruk.org**



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