



Guy's, King's and St Thomas' Cancer Centre

Radiotherapy for benign skin conditions

The aim of this information sheet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about having radiotherapy for your benign skin condition. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any questions, or would like more advice, please ask a member of your treatment team. The team consists of radiographers, doctors and nurses who will help and support you throughout your treatment

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is used for treating cancer; however some benign (non-cancer) skin conditions can also be treated. **These may include:**

- keloid scars – an overgrowth of scar tissue, which may be painful, itchy and unsightly
- eczema
- psoriasis.

The radiotherapy you receive will either be low-energy x-rays (superficial) or electrons. The choice will depend on the area being treated. Its side-effects are isolated to the area where you are having your treatment.

Your doctor will prescribe the amount of radiation needed for your treatment. This amount may be given in one treatment or divided up into smaller doses (called 'fractions') that are given over a period of days or weeks.

How is the treatment planned?

Before you can start your radiotherapy the treatment has to be planned specifically for you.

You will need to come to:

St Thomas' Hospital

Clinical Oncology Department, Lower ground floor, Lambeth Wing

t: 020 7188 5918

You will be asked to sign a form giving your consent to the treatment. This is to confirm that you agree to have radiotherapy. If you have any further questions please ask the radiographers, when they ask you to verbally confirm that you wish to have radiotherapy.

To plan the treatment, you will need to lie on a treatment couch. A doctor will use a bright light and a magnifying glass to look at the area of your body that needs to be treated. Sometimes marks will be put onto your skin with a felt pen to outline the area(s) of treatment.

The radiographer will record the treatment area by taking measurements and, with your consent, a photograph. This planning session will last about 30 minutes.

Treatment may be given to you the same day, or you may need to come back to the hospital. We will tell you what to expect.

What happens during radiotherapy treatment?

We may need to protect the surrounding area of your skin with a thin piece of sheet lead, placed on your skin. This is to prevent the radiation from damaging that area.

Part of the radiotherapy machine will rest on your skin during treatment. You may feel a small amount of pressure on your skin because of this. The treatment itself is painless and you will not feel anything when the machine is switched on.

The radiographer will leave the room while the treatment is being given but will watch you on closed circuit television. If you need help, wave your hand. The radiographer can stop the treatment and return to the room to assist you.

Treatment can last between two and eight minutes and it is important that you keep still.

When your treatment ends, the radiographer will remove the felt pen marks and tell you how to look after your skin. Further appointment times will be given to you if they are needed.

What are the side-effects of radiotherapy treatment?

The most common side-effect of radiotherapy is skin tenderness. Only skin in the treatment area will experience side-effects. This can last for one to three weeks depending on the number of treatments that you have. If you have any hair growing in the area, it may fall out. Your hair may start to grow back a few months after treatment.

How do I look after my skin during treatment?

Keloid scars

If you have recently had surgery, follow the advice you were given about care, such as removal of stitches or dressings.

Other conditions

If you use steroid creams, you should switch to aqueous cream until the skin reaction settles. Please ask your dermatologist for more information. Keep the area dry, as much as possible, until it heals.

Washing the treatment area

- Wash the area gently with tepid water only and unperfumed soap.

- Pat the area dry with a soft towel, do not rub.
- Use a little petroleum jelly or aqueous cream to keep the area moisturised.
- Do not use make-up, concealing creams or any other products on the treated area.

Please follow these instructions until your skin reaction settles.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

We will tell you if you need to have a follow-up appointment. If you are unsure when this is, please ask the radiographer on your last day of treatment.

Who should I contact if I am worried?

If you need to talk to someone during your course of treatment, contact the Clinical Oncology department at St Thomas' **t: 020 7188 1445/**

If you have a problem after treatment ends, please contact your dermatology nurse or if it is out of hours please contact your GP.

Keloid patients

If you have an urgent problem out of hours (for example bleeding from the excision site) please phone **020 7188 7188** and ask the operator to bleep the plastic surgeon on call.

If there is a problem after treatment ends, Keloid patients should contact the St Thomas' Hospital Day Surgery Unit on **020 7188 3222**.



Dimbleby Cancer Care is the cancer support service for Guy's and St Thomas'. They have drop-in information centres, and also offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice.

Drop-in information centres are located at Guy's in Oncology Outpatients (Ground floor, Tabard Annexe) and at St Thomas' on the Lower Ground Floor, Lambeth Wing.

t: 020 7188 5918 e: RichardDimblebyCentre@gstt.nhs.uk

PALS – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Ask a member of staff to direct you to PALS or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy's e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language support services – If you need an interpreter or information about the care you are receiving in the language or format of your choice, please get in touch using the following contact details:

t: 020 7188 8815 fax: 020 7188 5953 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk