

Palliative lung radiotherapy

This information booklet is about radiotherapy for lung cancer. 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.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy uses radiation (high energy x-rays or similar rays) to treat cancer. It damages your body's cells within the treatment area, killing the cancer cells but allowing your normal cells to recover. Its side effects are usually only in the area you are having treated.

Planning your treatment

Before your planning appointment you will have been asked to sign a consent form. This is to confirm that you agree to have radiotherapy treatment. If you have any further questions please ask the radiographers at your first treatment appointment, when they ask you to verbally confirm your consent to have radiotherapy.

To plan your treatment you will need to have a CT scan of your chest which will take about 15 minutes.

You will need to remove your clothing from the waist upwards and then lie on a treatment couch, usually flat on your back with your arms by your sides. The radiographers will move you into position. The CT scanner will take an x-ray of the treatment area while the couch passes slowly through the scanner and back again. It will not touch you and you will not feel anything. During the procedure it is important that you keep as still as possible and breathe normally.

You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the radiographers will watch you all the time on closed circuit television. If you need anything, raise your arm and the radiographers can return to the room.

The radiographers will put some pen marks on your skin which can be washed off after this visit. They will then make one or two small permanent marks on your skin (a tattoo) using ink and a needle. These marks help the radiographers move you into exactly the right position for each treatment.

Before you leave the department we will give you information about your treatment schedule.

Treatment

The amount of radiation needed for your treatment is divided into small daily doses.

Treatment is daily from Monday to Friday, unless you are told otherwise. You will be in the treatment room for approximately 15 minutes.

When you arrive for your first appointment please report to the reception desk, where you will be directed to the treatment area.

A radiographer will explain your treatment and answer any questions that you may have.

During treatment

You will need to remove your clothing from the waist upwards so that the radiographers can see the permanent marks on your skin. The radiographers will help you lie on the treatment couch in the same position as when you had your CT scan. They will move the treatment machine into position. It will come very close to you but will not touch you. They will then leave the room to switch the machine on. It is important that you keep as still as possible throughout your treatment and continue to breathe normally.

You will be alone in the room during your treatment, but the radiographers will be watching you all the time on closed circuit television. If you require assistance raise your arm and the radiographers will return to the room. There may be some music playing in the background and you will hear some noises from the machine but you will not feel anything.

Treatment review

If you have a specific problem during your treatment, tell the radiographers. If necessary, they will arrange for you to be seen by a doctor.

Side effects during radiotherapy

Not everyone will experience all the side effects that we mention in this guide. Do not feel that the radiotherapy is not working if you do not experience all the side effects, as people react individually.

Skin reaction

It is common to have a skin reaction from radiotherapy. Any reaction will not happen immediately, it can develop over several treatments. Skin in the treatment area may become dry, red and itchy.

- **Moisturising** in the treatment area will help your skin to cope better. You may continue to use your usual moisturiser or if you need to buy one, we recommend one without the additive, sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS). During treatment, apply the moisturiser sparingly twice a day or more often if your skin is very itchy.
- **Washing:** It is important to keep the treatment area clean. Shower/bath using lukewarm water and use your usual soap or shower gel. Aqueous cream may be used as a soap substitute but not as a leave-on moisturiser. Use a soft towel to gently pat the skin dry – do not rub.
- **Swimming:** Reduce the number of times you swim in chlorinated water as this can have a drying effect on the skin. After swimming, shower to remove excess chlorine and discontinue swimming if the skin becomes sore.

Eating difficulties

You may have problems eating due to loss of appetite or because you are feeling unwell. You may also find eating difficult, as your food pipe (oesophagus) might become sore if it is within the treatment area. Speak to the radiographers who will give you advice or can refer you to a dietician.

Try to drink at least six to eight glasses of fluid a day.

Tiredness

This treatment may make you feel tired. Several things can cause this:

- Your body needs to repair itself, which uses energy.
- You may be having or have had chemotherapy, which can also make you feel very tired.
- Travelling to and from the hospital for appointments.
- The change in daily routines.

This does not mean that you have to put your normal life on hold. Give yourself time to relax. Do not fight the tiredness. Macmillan Cancer Support produces a booklet called **Coping with Fatigue**. It can be ordered free of charge – contact details are on page 4 of this booklet.

Other symptoms

You may find that your symptoms such as a productive cough and breathlessness get slightly worse during your treatment. These symptoms will gradually settle down after your treatment ends.

General advice

- **Washing:** It is important to keep the treatment area clean. Shower/bath using lukewarm water and use your usual soap or shower gel. Aqueous cream may be used as a soap substitute but not as a leave-on moisturiser. Use a soft towel to gently pat the skin dry – do not rub.
- **Swimming:** Reduce the number of times you swim in chlorinated water as this can have a drying effect on the skin. After swimming, shower to remove excess chlorine and discontinue swimming if the skin becomes sore.

After treatment

Radiotherapy side effects reach a peak about seven to ten days after your treatment is finished. During this period any side effects you have experienced may continue to get worse or if you had no side effects some may develop. The majority of these side effects will settle down about one month after treatment. If you have any questions please ask the radiographers or your doctor.

About one month after your treatment ends, you will need to return to the clinic where you were originally seen. Please make sure on your last day of radiotherapy that this appointment has been booked. The radiographers can help you to arrange this.

Coping with lung cancer

The people taking care of you understand that being diagnosed with cancer is very stressful, and the treatment for it may increase your concerns. After a diagnosis of lung cancer, you may have specific worries. **These might include:**

- coping with personal relationships
- talking about your diagnosis
- continuing with social and work activities.

Many people feel unable to cope with what is happening to them and feel anxious or depressed. It can be helpful to know that most people find these feelings ease with time. Discuss your concerns with any of the staff that are involved in your treatment, as well as your family and friends. This is important as it may help you to find answers to the questions that you may be asking yourself.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is available if you need additional support. The service provides information, psychological support, welfare benefits advice and complementary therapy. Please see page 5 for further information.

Support groups

There are monthly lung cancer support groups for patients and their carers. For more information please contact your lung cancer clinical nurse specialist (contact details on page 5).

Useful sources of information

Macmillan Information & Support Centre

Cicely Saunders Institute
King's College Hospital
London SE5 9RS

t: 020 3299 5229

British Lung Foundation

t: 08458 505020

w: www.lunguk.org

Cancer Research UK

t: 0808 800 4040 (freephone)

w: www.cancerhelp.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support (freephone)

t: 0808 808 0000 (information on all aspects of cancer)

w: www.macmillan.org.uk

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation

t: 0800 358 7200 (freephone)

w: www.roycastle.org

Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/cancer-leaflets. For information leaflets on other conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Dimbleby Cancer Care has a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offers complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers. We're located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy's. **t:** 020 7188 5918 **e:** DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk

The **Dimbleby Macmillan Support Centre** at Guy's Cancer at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup offers information, psychological support and complementary therapies.

t: 020 7188 0771 **e:** DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk

Contact us

You can contact the radiotherapy department reception at the Cancer Centre at Guy's on **020 7188 7188** (enter extension number **57542** or **57569**). You can contact the main reception at Guy's Cancer at Queen Mary's Hospital on **020 7188 0770**.

There are specialist lung cancer nurses who are available for advice and support. They can also put you in touch with your local hospital Lung Cancer Nurse. If you would like to contact them please call **020 7188 4758** (Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5pm, Friday 8am to 4pm).

If you have a problem in the evening or weekend, please contact the main switchboard on 020 7188 7188 and ask for 'operator' or press 0. Then ask the operator for the oncology registrar on call.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the clinical nurse specialist or other member of staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

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

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health. **w:** www.nhs.uk

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