



# Radiotherapy to the bladder



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**This information booklet is about radiotherapy to the bladder. 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 in the treatment area, killing the cancer cells but allowing your normal cells to recover. Its side effects are generally isolated to the area you are having treated. Before you can start your radiotherapy the treatment has to be planned specifically for you.

## **Planning your treatment**

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

You will need to come to the Cancer Centre at Guy's for a planning CT scan. This is a scan of your pelvis. It takes about 15 minutes. You will need to have an **empty bladder** for this scan. If you have a catheter you will need to make sure it is draining correctly and your leg bag is not full.

The radiographers will give you a hospital gown to wear and will ask you to remove your shoes and clothes from the waist down. Please return the gown to the radiographers after your scan.

You will be asked to lie on the scanning table and the radiographers will move you into position. The couch will move slowly through the open scanner. You will not feel anything and nothing will touch you. Breathe normally and keep as still as possible.

At the end of the scan the radiographers will take some measurements and put some small permanent marks on your skin using ink and a needle. These marks allow the treatment radiographers to make sure you are in the same position each time for your treatment. You will be given your treatment start date, which will be about two weeks later.

## **Treatment**

You will usually have one treatment a day from Monday to Friday, with a rest at the weekend. Occasionally treatment may be given on a Saturday. Your doctor will tell you how many treatments you will need. Please ask if you are not sure. Each treatment will take about 15 minutes.

### **What do I need to bring with me?**

You do not need to bring anything. You will be given a gown to change into for each treatment, as discussed at your CT scan.

## What do I do when I come for my first treatment appointment?

Your appointment card will tell you where you need to go for treatment:

A radiographer will explain what will happen during treatment; please feel free to ask any questions that you have.

## What will I need to do during my treatment?

You will need an **empty bladder** before each treatment. Staff will tell you when you can go to the toilet. If you have a catheter you will need to make sure it is draining correctly and your leg bag is not full.

You will be asked to change into your gown in a changing room.

The radiographers will move you on the treatment table into the same position you were in for the scan. They will then move the treatment machine into position. It will come close to you, but will not touch you.

The machine will move around you to treat from different angles. Each area takes around one minute to treat and you will have the same areas treated each day. It is important that you keep still throughout your treatment and breathe normally.

The radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on. You will be alone in the room during treatment, but the radiographers will be watching you on closed-circuit TV.

If you need help, wave your arm. The machine can be switched off and the radiographers can return to the room to assist you.

## Treatment review

You will be seen during your treatment and at the end to arrange your follow-up appointment. If you have a specific problem with your treatment, or any side effects, you can be seen more often.

## Side effects during radiotherapy

You may not experience all the possible side effects outlined below, as people react individually.

### Tiredness

As your treatment progresses you may feel more tired.

Several things can cause this:

- the treatment itself (the body needs to repair itself, which uses up energy)
- chemotherapy before or during your radiotherapy, which can make you feel very tired
- travelling to and from hospital for your appointments
- changes to daily routine and interrupted sleep.

This does not mean that you have to put your life on hold. Give yourself time to relax, do not fight the tiredness and try to eat a healthy diet and take gentle exercise. Macmillan has a booklet called **Coping with fatigue** which provides more advice. Their contact details are on page 11 of this booklet.

## **Urinary frequency and bladder inflammation (cystitis)**

You may find that you have an urgent need to pass urine more frequently during treatment. Try to drink as much water as you can: at least six to eight glasses a day. Limit yourself to one caffeine or alcoholic drink a day, as they can aggravate this feeling.

If you find that your sleep is disturbed because of this, try to stop drinking at least one hour before you go to bed.

If the problem persists, or you experience a burning sensation passing urine, tell the radiographers. You can be given a urine test to check for infection and treated with antibiotics, if needed.

## **Diarrhoea**

Your bowel movements may become looser. If this happens, reduce the fibre in your diet. This includes high-fibre cereal, brown bread, fruit and vegetables. If you would like further advice, ask the radiographers. Try to drink at least six to eight glasses of fluid a day to avoid dehydration but avoid fresh fruit juices as they can make diarrhoea worse.

## **Sexuality and cancer**

Due to the radiotherapy, some men will be unable to achieve or sustain an erection. Women may find that sex becomes difficult and uncomfortable.

In either case consult your doctor who can offer advice about these issues.

Macmillan produces a leaflet called **Sexuality and cancer**. You can order it free of charge (contact details are on page 11 of this booklet).

## General advice during radiotherapy treatment

### 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.

### Moisturising

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

### Clothing

Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Underwear should be made of cotton. Avoid underwear that is tight and confining to avoid getting too hot and making your skin sore. Boxer-short-style underwear is suitable for men.

### 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**

The side effects from radiotherapy reach a peak about seven to 10 days after your treatment is complete. During this time any side effects you have experienced may 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 further questions please ask the radiographers or your doctor.

You will be given an appointment to come back to see the doctor in six to eight weeks. The radiographers will give you more information about this in your last week of treatment.

On the last day of treatment, you will be given a Treatment Completion Form summarising your treatment. We will send one copy to your GP and give you one for your own records.

## **Coping with cancer of the bladder**

When you have a diagnosis of bladder cancer, you may have specific concerns. These may include coping with personal relationships, talking about your diagnosis, and continuing with social and work engagements. You may feel unable to cope with what is happening to you, and may feel anxious or depressed. It can be helpful to know that most people find that these feelings ease with time.

Discussing your worries with any of the staff that are involved in your treatment, as well as your family and friends, is important. This can help you to find answers to the questions that you may be asking yourself.

## Support group

There is a support group for people with bladder cancer and their carers. It is a chance to meet other people who have had a similar experience. For more information, call Dimbleby Cancer Care on 020 7188 5918.

## Contact us

Radiotherapy reception	020 7188 7188 (ext 57542 or 57569)
Radiotherapy bookings	020 7188 3160
Radiotherapy treatment support team (8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday)	020 7188 4220
Acute oncology assessment unit (9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)	020 7188 3754
<b>Out of hours oncology doctor on call</b> If you require assistance out of hours, please phone the hospital on <b>020 7188 7188</b> and ask them to contact the oncology doctor on call. Please have your hospital number ready. The switchboard operator will take your details and ask the emergency oncology doctor to phone you back.  <b>If you are concerned, please go to your local emergency department.</b>	

## Further information

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

**t:** 0808 808 0000 (information on living with cancer)

**w:** [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

### **Cancer Research UK**

**t:** 0808 800 4040 (freephone)

**w:** [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)

### **The Bladder and Bowel Foundation**

**t:** 0845 345 0165

**w:** [www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org](http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org)

### **Urostomy Association**

**t:** 0870 770 7931

**w:** [www.uagbi.org](http://www.uagbi.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](http://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](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)



**Dimbleby Cancer Care** provides cancer support services for Guy's and St Thomas'. We have a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy's. **t:** 020 7188 5918  
**e:** [DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk)

## **Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the 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](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

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

## **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](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **Get involved: become a member of the Trust**

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved.

**t:** 0800 731 0319      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)

**w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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