



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

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# Radiotherapy to the prostate

**This information booklet is about radiotherapy to the prostate.**

**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.**

## How do I contact the radiotherapy department?

### **St Thomas' Hospital Radiotherapy Reception**

Lambeth wing      **t:** 020 7188 1460

South wing        **t:** 020 7188 1453

### **Guy's Hospital Radiotherapy Reception**

**t:** 020 7188 5581

If you have a serious problem in the evening or weekend, contact the hospital: **t:** 020 7188 7188 ask for 'operator' or press 0. Then ask the operator for the oncology registrar on call.

## What happens at my first appointment?

Your first appointment will be with a specialist cancer doctor (an oncologist). This could be at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals, or depending on where you live, at a local hospital where your oncologist holds a clinic.

You will have the opportunity to discuss the details of your radiotherapy treatment with your doctor and the possible short-term and long-term side effects. Your doctor will ask you to read and sign a consent form for your treatment - this must be signed before your appointment for radiotherapy planning.

## Planning your treatment

You will be sent a letter with an appointment for a CT scan in the Radiotherapy Department at St Thomas' hospital.

Before you have radiotherapy it is important to plan your treatment. The area of the body which is treated is very precise so careful planning is needed to ensure the treatment is given to the exact same spot each time. This is done by having a CT scan of your pelvis.

## What happens at my CT scan appointment?

Before the scan your radiographers will explain what is going to happen and will ask you to try to empty your bladder and bowel and they will ask you to drink 350mls of water so your bladder is full.

**You will need an empty bowel and a full bladder for the scan and also for all of your treatments.**

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.

Your radiographers will help you on to the couch of the scanner. You will be lying on your back with your hands on your chest. Your head will be in a head rest and your knees and ankles will be supported in specially shaped rests.

The radiographers will leave the room while the scan is being done. But they can talk to you if necessary and they will be watching you on cameras all the time. The couch will move through the open ended scanner very slowly, it will take about three minutes. You will need to lie still, but breathe normally as you move through the scanner.

When the scan has finished, the radiographers will come back into the room to make some measurements on your skin.

Your radiographers will make three small permanent marks on your skin using ink and a needle. These marks show the radiographers exactly where the treatment needs to be given each time that you attend. Any felt pen marks can be washed off after this visit. You will be sent an appointment list with your treatment machine, dates and times for all of your treatments.

## Treatment

Your treatment will start about two weeks after your CT scan. The total dose of radiation you will receive is divided into smaller doses given daily, these are called fractions. The length of a course of radiotherapy can vary, but in some situations it can last up to eight weeks. Treatment is usually given daily Monday to Friday, with a rest at the weekends. You will be in the treatment room for about twenty minutes each time you come.

## What do I need to bring with me?

Please bring your dressing gown to change into before your treatment, as discussed at your CT scan.

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

When you arrive, please report to the reception desk:

### **St Thomas' Hospital**

Clinical Oncology, Lower Ground Floor, Lambeth Wing for Elekta 1, 4 and Tomotherapy.

**OR** South Wing Radiotherapy, Ground Floor for Elekta 2 and 3

### **Guy's Hospital**

Radiotherapy, Basement, Borough Wing for Elekta 5 and 6

The receptionist will direct you to the treatment area, where a radiographer will spend some time with you explaining what will happen during your treatment, any side effects and dietary advice.

Please feel free to ask any questions or talk through any concerns you may have.

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

You will need to have an empty bowel and a full bladder for your treatment; there are water fountains in the waiting areas in the department if you need them. Having a full bladder and empty bowel helps to move the position of the prostate gland slightly and helps to reduce the side effects of treatment.

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

In the treatment room you will be helped to lie in the same position as you were in during the CT scan.

The radiographers will move the couch and treatment machine into position. When you are correctly lined up with the machine, the radiographers will leave the room to switch the machine on.

You need to lie still during the treatment but 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.

There may be some music playing in the background and you might hear some noises from the machine. You will not feel anything, the treatment is painless.

After the first part of your treatment, the machine will be moved into position for the next area to be treated. The radiographers will move the machine around you from outside the room. Each area takes a few seconds to treat and you will have the same areas treated each day.

Each week you will be able to see either a doctor or a treatment review radiographer. If you have any problems with your treatment or any side effects, please tell the radiographers treating you, if necessary they can arrange for you to be seen.

## Side effects during radiotherapy

Some people have more side effects than others during radiotherapy. You may not experience all of the side effects listed below but this does not mean the treatment is not working as well. It is important to remember everyone reacts to treatment differently.

### Change in bowel habit

You may find your bowel habit changes and you need to open your bowels more often.

If you develop diarrhoea, then reduce the roughage in your diet. For example, cutting out high fibre breakfast cereal, brown bread, fruit juice, leafy green vegetables and fruit can be helpful. The radiographers can give you practical advice on what to eat and what to avoid.

If your diarrhoea continues then ask your radiographers to arrange for a prescription for medication to help control your symptoms.

Try to drink at least 2 litres (4 pints) of fluid a day, we recommend the following fluids:

- water
- squash
- juice
- milk
- herbal teas (caffeine-free).

### Please remember:

If you are a **diabetic** you will need to have appropriate drinks without sugar

If you suffer from **arthritis**, **heartburn** or **irritable bowel syndrome**, you need to limit the amount of cranberry juice to 2 glasses a day.

If you are taking **warfarin**, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice on which drinks are appropriate for you. Some fruit juices (such as cranberry) may interact with warfarin and affect your INR.

### Urinary frequency

A common side effect of radiotherapy can be the worsening of any difficulties you may already have in passing urine. As treatment progresses you may find you have to pass urine more frequently, you might experience increased urgency and the flow may be reduced.

These are normal side effects. However, if you experience stinging or burning when passing urine please inform your radiographers as these can be signs of a urinary infection. If there is an infection in your urine a doctor will prescribe a course of antibiotics for you.

If you are starting to experience urinary problems try to reduce your intake of the following:

- caffeinated drinks (coffee, tea, cola)
- fizzy drinks
- alcohol
- high energy drinks such as Redbull.

Try to drink regularly throughout the day (every hour if possible).

## **General tiredness (fatigue)**

As you continue through your treatment, it is likely to make you feel extremely tired. This can be caused by several things:

- The treatment itself – your body needs to repair itself, which uses up energy.
- If you are having hormone therapy, this can make you feel very tired.
- Travelling to and from the hospital for your appointments. The change in your daily routine and interrupted nights.

This does not mean you have to put your normal life on hold. Give yourself time to relax, do not try to fight the tiredness. Try to eat a healthy, well balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. Some studies have shown that taking a 20 minute walk each day can help improve feelings of fatigue. Macmillan produce a booklet called 'Coping with Fatigue' which may be helpful to read. You can order a copy by contacting the helpline on t: 0808 808 0000 or from their website at [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

## **General advice while having radiotherapy**

### **Washing**

If possible, shower instead of bathing, use lukewarm water, not hot and do not stay in the shower for long periods of time. Do not use shower gel, bath oils and bubble bath as this may cause a skin reaction. Baby soap may be used to wash the treatment area. Pat the skin dry with a soft towel, do not rub as this may make the skin sore.

### **Clothing**

Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Underwear should be made of natural fibres such as cotton. Wear boxer short style underwear and not anything which is tight and confining, to avoid getting too hot and making your skin sore.

### **Swimming**

Do not use a swimming pool during the course of your treatment, as the chemicals in the water may dry the skin and cause a skin reaction.

### **Saunas and Turkish baths**

These should be avoided during treatment and for a few weeks after, to prevent drying out your skin.

## **Coping with cancer of the prostate**

We understand that being diagnosed with prostate cancer is a worrying time and treatments may increase your concerns. These might include coping with difficult side effects like impotence and incontinence, coping with personal relationships, talking to others about your diagnosis, continuing with social and work engagements. Some people feel unable to cope with what is happening to them and feel anxious or depressed. It can sometimes be helpful to know that most people find these feelings improve with time.

Discussing your concerns with the staff involved in your care, as well as your family and friends, is important. It may help you find answers to questions you have been asking yourself.

## Dimbleby Cancer Care

Some people find they need extra support to come to terms with the problems cancer can cause. If you feel you would like more support you can ask to be referred to Dimbleby Cancer Care, the cancer support service in Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals for cancer patients and their carers. They provide information, complementary therapies, psychological care and welfare benefits advice. If you would like to find out more please get in contact using the details on the back page.

## Support group

There is a prostate cancer support group held on the last Friday of each month at the Urology Centre, 1st floor Southwark Wing, Guy's Hospital. There are talks from clinical staff and a chance to talk to others going through a similar experience.

For more information **t:** 020 7188 7339

## Useful contacts

**The Prostate Cancer Charity** is available for information and support on their helpline:

**t:** 0800 074 8383 (freephone)

**w:** [www.prostate-cancer.org.uk](http://www.prostate-cancer.org.uk).

**The Sexual Advice Association** also have a helpline:

**t:** 020 7486 7262

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

**Incontinence advice** can be found on this website:

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

**t:** 0845 345 0165

**Macmillan Cancer Support**

**t:** 0808 808 0000

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

**Cancer Research UK**

**t:** 0808 800 4040

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



**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

**Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)** – For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

**t:** 020 7188 3416

### **Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future**

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email members@gstt.nhs.uk or visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk)