

Radiotherapy at the Berkshire Cancer Centre: general info and FAQs

This leaflet will let you know what to expect when having radiotherapy treatment at the Berkshire Cancer Centre and aims to answer some commonly asked questions. If there is anything else you would like to discuss, please speak to your radiographer.

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy uses high energy X-rays (photons) or electrons to kill cancer cells in a specific part of the body.

The goal of radiotherapy is to kill the cancer cells while avoiding as many healthy cells as possible. Although we do everything to ensure only cancer cells are killed, unfortunately, due to the nature of the treatment, some healthy cells can be damaged in the area of the body being treated. These healthy cells repair over time and this is why we ask you to be well hydrated (to drink enough fluids) and try to have a healthy balance diet during treatment to help with recovery.

The treatment is typically delivered in small doses every day over a course of a few days or weeks, ranging from 1 day to 7 weeks. Radiotherapy is often used in conjunction with other treatments such as chemotherapy, hormone therapy and brachytherapy.

It is very important to remember that not everyone with the same cancer will receive the same treatment, this is because the doctor will take into account many different factors before prescribing a course of radiotherapy.

Radiotherapy at the Berkshire Cancer Centre

The most common form of radiotherapy treatment is called external beam radiotherapy. Here at the Berkshire Cancer Centre we also provide brachytherapy (internal radiotherapy) and orthovoltage (superficial treatment for skin cancers). We deliver external beam radiotherapy with our Elekta Versa HD/ Agility Linear Accelerators. We have four machines across our two departments (in Reading and Bracknell).

Reading and Bracknell

Treatment slots are allocated based on the department's capacity. Please be aware that regardless of your postcode, we may be unable to accommodate you at the department you have requested. Situations that influence that decision include machine breakdowns, scheduled maintenance of the machine and bank holidays – all of which may require you have your treatment transferred to the other department/site.

We are all one team across both departments, which is why you may have your planning scan at the Reading department and have treatment at the Bracknell department. However, the Bracknell team are smaller and have limited access to doctor and expert team member support, as most staff are generally based at the Reading centre.

Please tell us your preferred department at the earliest opportunity and the team will try to be as accommodating as possible, based on availability and circumstances.

Appointments

We will always try to be as accommodating as possible with appointment time preferences; however, due to multiple factors outside of our control, we are not able to offer set appointment times throughout your treatment. You are welcome to request morning or afternoon appointments at the time of your planning scan or first treatment, but again, please keep in mind that we have patients using hospital transport, on certain medications or have needs that require them to have priority when appointments are scheduled.

You will receive an appointment list when you first come for treatment and then a new appointment list every Friday after that.

Please let the team know at the earliest opportunity if you have another appointment or commitment that would mean you need a different appointment time.

Machine delays

Our treatment machines are extremely sensitive and have lots of safety features in place in order to provide the best treatment safely. Occasionally, we have machine breakdowns that require a specialist team of engineers to thoroughly check and adjust the machine. This can take time, resulting in delays.

We are a very busy department and can treat up to 30 patients a day. Unfortunately, delays are sometimes unavoidable due to the nature of the treatment we deliver but the team are always working hard to avoid this and will always keep patients up to date.

When arriving at the department, please check the 'Delays Board' in the waiting room before starting to prepare for treatment, if you are required to do preparation such as bladder filling.

If for any reason we cannot provide treatment and it is appropriate, you may be given the opportunity to go home and come back later in the day or miss treatment for the day and have an extra treatment added on to the end of your treatment course. This will always be decided following discussion with your doctor.

Students and apprentices

During your time with us you will meet many members of staff and often get to know your team as you will see them every day. The treatment radiographers always work in pairs; however, you may notice an additional member of the team in the room, and this will usually be a student or an apprentice radiographer. We will always introduce ourselves and students to you before entering the treatment room. Our students are very professional and it is extremely important they get hands on experience. However, if you are uncomfortable with having students present, let us know at your earliest appointment.

We ask you to please consider that we are a teaching hospital and all training members of the team are supervised by a competent radiographer until they are qualified. You will always receive the highest standard of care.

Parking

We understand how stressful parking can be and many patients will try to use alternative transport if possible, such as lifts from family or friends, the bus or the park and ride. Let the team know if you need help or information with regards to travelling to appointments.

Our patients get free parking at both Reading and Bracknell. If attending appointments at

Reading, please give your registration number at reception to register for free parking. There is no need to do this at Bracknell as parking is free for all.

Support throughout treatment

Most patients will be seen weekly by a specialist review radiographer throughout treatment. This team will monitor your side effects and wellbeing to ensure you complete treatment without issue. This is in addition to seeing two treatment radiographers every day, who will be able to answer any questions or concerns and who can contact the review team or doctor if necessary. The Berkshire Cancer Centre works in collaboration with Macmillan Cancer Support. You will find a Macmillan Information Centre near the Redlands Road entrance to the department, where the team will be happy to offer help and support on a host of topics such as financial issues, housing issues, work issues and much more.

Common questions

Working and normal routine: Many patients are able to work during treatment and continue to do so throughout. However, depending on other factors such as additional treatment and side effects, you may wish to take some time off. We encourage you to try keep to your normal routine but to also listen to your body and rest when you feel you need to.

Exercising: Gentle exercise is encouraged throughout treatment to help with overall health and wellbeing and fatigue, a common side effect experienced during radiotherapy.

Driving to radiotherapy treatment: Many patients drive to their appointments throughout treatment with no issues. However, some patients experiencing fatigue may wish to have a family member or friend drive them instead.

Do I need to bring someone with me for each treatment? You do not need to bring someone with you for treatment, although many patients do bring someone for support.

Please feel free to ask for more advice on these topics. Your doctor or review radiographer will be able to help you understand how you are likely to feel throughout treatment.

Contact us

Tel: 0118 322 8869 Monday-Friday 8.30am-5.00pm or
e-mail: ReviewRadiographers@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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