

Radiotherapy: Frequently asked questions

Radiotherapy is one of the main treatments for cancer. This leaflet answers some of the questions most commonly asked by newly diagnosed patients.

“Will I become radioactive?”

External Beam Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive and it is perfectly safe for you to interact with others, including babies and children, after treatment.

Different advice applies for patients who have radioactive seeds implanted into their prostate, see our leaflet called ‘Brachytherapy treatment for prostate cancer – Iodine-125 seed implant’ www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/media/gc2l41tg/brachytherapy-treatment-for-prostate-cancer_jul21.pdf.

“Is radiotherapy painful?”

Radiotherapy is not painful and you will not feel or see anything during the radiotherapy. You will hear beeps and whirring noises as treatment is delivered.

“Will I lose my hair?”

You will only lose hair that is in the area of treatment. This is a gradual loss and hair often regrows slowly in the weeks and months following the radiotherapy. However, some hair loss may be permanent.

“Will the radiotherapy machine move on its own?”

The machine does not move on its own – it is controlled by the radiographers. The machine moves around you and gives treatment from different angles.

You may feel anxious that you will be enclosed by the treatment machine but, although it comes close, it will not touch you at all.

“Can you tell how the treatment is going; has my tumour shrunk?”

The types of scans that we do during treatment are to ensure that we have you in the right position for treatment and that we are targeting the treatment to the right area. They are not detailed enough to show cancer cells. We have to complete the full course of treatment, allow the body to recover and then your oncologist (doctor specialising in cancer) will discuss the outcome of the treatment with you at your follow-up appointment.

“Can I start and stop the course of treatment as I wish?”

Once we have started the course of treatment we aim to complete it without any breaks or days off, apart from weekends. However, some patients may have a medical reason that occurs during treatment that prevents them from coming in. This would need to be discussed in the first

instance with the Radiotherapy Treatment Team, your oncologist, or your clinical nurse specialist. Please call as soon as you can so we can make any arrangements or discuss with your oncologist.

Occasionally, the treatment machines experience technical problems. This may mean we would need to reschedule some patients' treatments for another day. Some patients that miss treatments can have them added on to the end of the course, or at a weekend. While some other patients need continuous treatment so may need to have two treatments in one day to compensate for any treatments that are missed. If this is necessary, the Radiotherapy Treatment Team will discuss this with you. We would prefer to avoid unplanned gaps in treatment, wherever possible.

“Can I book a holiday as soon as my radiotherapy has finished?”

We recommend that you do not book a holiday to start immediately your treatment is due to finish in case there are any delays which may affect your finish date. Depending up the treatment that you have, some people may not feel up to travelling on holiday as soon as their treatment has finished.

“Can I choose my appointment times?”

We will do our best to accommodate your preference for appointment times; however, due to the number of other patients that also have existing bookings and other factors, it may not always be possible to meet everyone's requests.

Where to get further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/radiotherapy/>

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/types-of-treatment/radiotherapy>

Find all of our cancer radiotherapy leaflets on our website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/our-services/cancer/?showAllLeaflets=true&catlogue=services

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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