



At the end of your radiotherapy treatment

This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions patients and their families may have on completion of radiotherapy treatment and to advise you on what to expect over the next few weeks, particularly ongoing side effects.

Side effects

Any side effects that you have experienced due to your radiotherapy treatment, such as sickness, sore throat, diarrhoea or fatigue/tiredness, may continue to develop in the few weeks after you have finished your radiotherapy, before gradually settling down. The length of time that this takes will vary from person to person.

Fatigue can sometimes last for weeks or sometimes even months. If you are struggling to cope, please speak to either your review radiographer, clinical nurse specialist, GP or oncology doctor, they will all be able to help you.

You should continue to take any medication that you have been prescribed to help manage the side effects for as long as you feel you need it.

If you have lost your hair as a result of radiotherapy treatment, it will not start to regrow for at least two months. This time depends on how much treatment you have had and the area where the treatment was given, but sometimes the hair does not regrow. Each person is different and you will be advised individually.

How should I look after my skin?

Your skin may have become pink or darker, and sore during your treatment. This may get worse for a week or two before it starts to settle. If your skin has not darkened or become sore during your radiotherapy, it may still do so after your treatment has finished. Some patients find that their skin stays sore for up to six weeks; this is quite normal. Continue following any skin care advice from your radiographer for as long as you feel you need it.

The skin reaction will settle down, but the time that this takes can vary, depending on how bad your reaction was and the type of treatment you have had.

Care should be taken when exposing the treated skin to the sun and wind as it will be more sensitive now and in the future. A high factor sunscreen, factor 50 should be used on the treated area if it cannot be covered from the sun and you are advised to limit sun exposure to the treated area when possible.

How do I manage tiredness (fatigue)?

Radiotherapy can make you feel tired and this can continue for weeks or months after the treatment has finished. We advise that you listen to your body, rest when you need to but try to still remain fairly active. It has been shown that it can be helpful to have a little light exercise each day (e.g. 20 minutes walking). Ideally, this will be at a pace that gets your heart and lungs working a little harder than normal but only within your own level of ability.

The increased flow of oxygen from the exercise can make you feel less tired and can also lift your spirits.

It may also be that you are tired because you are not sleeping well at night. Relaxation techniques may help with this, or you can discuss sleep problems with your review radiographer, clinical nurse specialist or your GP.

What about my diet?

Try to eat a balanced diet, including plenty of protein from sources such as lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs and cheese, or pulses and beans if you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet. Ensure you are eating some fruit and vegetables for fibre and vitamins too. It is also advisable to drink plenty of fluids as this can help your body to flush out toxins, which can sometimes cause sluggishness.

If the side effects of treatment have altered your appetite or bowel habits, please continue to follow the advice you were given during treatment. Return to your usual diet slowly until your body is able to manage what is normal for you.

How will I feel when I finish radiotherapy treatment?

After having daily contact with staff and other patients, some patients feel quite low in mood when they finish treatment. This is a normal reaction. Sometimes, these feelings can be made worse by tiredness, but they will pass with time. Joining a support group where you can share your experiences with others may help. The Macmillan Cancer Information Centre can signpost you to national or local support groups for the cancer you were diagnosed with.

Cancer Rehabilitation Services can offer support and signpost you to additional help. You can also find support by contacting your clinical specialist nurse. Contact details for all these services are below.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Your follow-up appointment will usually be at the hospital where you were originally seen. This appointment will be with your oncology doctor or a member of their team to assess or discuss your progress. Sometimes, this appointment may be over the telephone.

This appointment is usually around six weeks after your radiotherapy has finished. This is to allow your treatment to carry on working, give time for any side effects to settle down and to give your body time to recover.

How to contact us

Radiotherapy Department, Tel: 0118 322 7872 (9am-5pm)

Radiotherapy Clinic Tel: 0118 322 7890 (9am-5pm)

Radiotherapy Review Radiographers, Tel: 0118 322 8869 (9am-5pm Mon-Friday)

Macmillan Cancer Information Centre, Tel: 0118 322 8700

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS), Tel: 0118 322 8338 or PALS@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Cancer Rehabilitation Team, Tel: 01344662909 or cancer.rehabilitation@nhs.net

Useful organisations and websites

Macmillan Cancer Support 0808 808 2020 www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Smoking Helpline 0300 123 1044 <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/>

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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Next review due: June 2028