



**Royal Berkshire**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Short course radiotherapy for brain metastases**

Information for patients beginning  
radiotherapy treatment

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## You have been recommended radiotherapy treatment – this leaflet explains what happens next...

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In the clinic today, you and your doctor agreed that you are going to have radiotherapy treatment for your cancer. This booklet discusses what you can expect during and after your treatment and gives some general advice and information.

You will be given time to discuss any concerns with the radiographer (a person trained to give radiotherapy) at your planning appointment.

You may be given an appointment at your clinic appointment, or you may be contacted by telephone to arrange an appointment for the CT scan which forms part of the planning of your radiotherapy treatment and can take up to two hours. During this telephone call please mention if:

- You have a pacemaker or other implanted cardiac device as radiotherapy can affect some types of cardiac device.
- You have any problems with travel or appointment times and we will do our best to help you.

If you have any questions regarding your CT scan appointment, then you can contact us on the number below:

**Telephone: 0118 322 7872, Monday-Friday 8.30am-4.30pm**

**Email: [Radiotherapy.planning@nhs.net](mailto:Radiotherapy.planning@nhs.net)**

### **Brain tumours and driving**

Once you have been diagnosed with a brain tumour **you must not drive** and you **must** inform the DVLA of your diagnosis. The DVLA can be contacted by telephone on 0300 123 0883. Full details and advice are also available on the DVLA website [www.gov.uk/brain-tumour-and-driving](http://www.gov.uk/brain-tumour-and-driving). For further information please ask your clinical nurse specialist.

If you suffer from seizures, your oncologist or GP may prescribe you anti-seizure medication.

## **What are the benefits of radiotherapy?**

The benefits of radiotherapy are due to its effect against cancer in the area being treated. Radiotherapy uses high energy x-rays to kill cancer cells. Our bodies are made up of different cells, and all cells have the capacity to divide. If radiation hits a cell that is dividing, it will be damaged. Unlike normal cells, cancer cells are much less able to repair the damage so more of them will be destroyed.

## **Pregnancy**

**Patients with childbearing capacity must not be pregnant or become pregnant at any time during a course of radiotherapy** as radiation can be harmful to the unborn child. It is important to let the radiographers know if you have missed a period or suspect that you may be pregnant, before you are exposed to any radiation.

Patients with childbearing capacity will be asked to confirm their pregnancy status prior to planning the radiotherapy and again on the first day of radiotherapy treatment. This applies to all those with childbearing capacity between the ages of 10-56 years and is a legal requirement.

## **Planning your radiotherapy treatment**

Before you can start radiotherapy treatment, it needs to be carefully planned. The radiotherapy department staff will explain what to expect and answer any of your questions.

Once you have been referred for radiotherapy, you will either be given an appointment in clinic or a member of the radiotherapy team will telephone you with an appointment to attend the radiotherapy department in the Berkshire Cancer Centre (BCC) or Bracknell Healthspace for a CT scan, which is the first stage in planning your treatment. If you have any problems with travel or appointment times, please mention these when we contact you about your CT

scan appointment. We will do our best to help you. You may also provide a car registration number if you or a friend or relative drives you to the hospital for your appointments, this will ensure you receive free parking in the multi-storey car park and the car park location on London Road. Please do this at the radiotherapy reception desk. Whilst you have access to free parking, it does not guarantee a parking space. Parking availability at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Bracknell Healthspace can be very limited.

At the start of your planning appointment you will meet our specialist team who will explain what is going to happen and answer any of your questions. Our planning and treatment teams are comprised of male and female radiographers. You may also meet radiography students and apprentices involved with the delivery of your treatment under close supervision as The Berkshire Cancer Centre is a training centre.

Your planning appointment is divided into two halves. For the first half we make a mask for your treatment and in the second half you have a CT scan wearing that mask, this scan helps us plan your treatment.

## **Making the mask:**

It is very important that you keep as still as possible during the radiotherapy so we make a mask that helps keep you in place for your radiotherapy planning and treatment. We also put markings on the mask to help plan the treatment.

You will be asked to lie down on the couch on your back. We have a variety of different neck rests in order to support your neck so if it does feel uncomfortable please let the team know and we will try and change it.

Please remove necklaces or earrings for your planning appointment. False teeth or dental plates may also need to be removed.

The mask begins as a flat piece of plastic with lots of holes in it. This is placed in warm water and stretched over your head and neck. It

then cools and sets into a personalised mask with plenty of air holes. This takes about eight minutes.

People may feel anxious or claustrophobic when wearing the mask. If you have concerns about this or experience these feelings, please let the radiotherapy team know. There is often something we can do to help.

## CT scan

The CT scan takes place in the radiotherapy department, and the scan itself takes only a few minutes. You will be wearing your mask during the scan and once you are positioned correctly on the bed, we will take a few

measurements and put some marks on the mask.



We will then let you know that we are leaving the room to start the scan but we are able to see you throughout the whole procedure. During the scan you will move through the scanner, however you will not see or feel anything. You can breathe normally throughout the scan. The scan takes 2-3 minutes. It does not hurt and it is very important that you stay very still during the scan. The radiographers are watching you throughout the whole procedure so if you did need them you only need to raise a hand and they can come straight in.

Once the scan is over, we will come back in and remove the mask.

After your CT scan you will be given the date and time for your treatment appointment. This will be approximately 1-10 days after your CT scan. This allows us time to create a plan for your treatment.

## **Radiotherapy for brain metastases**

You oncologist will prescribe you a number of treatments, which will be given daily or on a less frequent basis.

### **Your first radiotherapy treatment**

When you arrive for your treatment, please check in at the treatment area reception. On your first treatment you will have a chat with one of the team of radiographers who will be treating you. They will:

- Check your details.
- Give you a list of the first week's appointment times.
- Discuss the treatment procedure.
- Outline the potential side effects.
- Answer any questions you may have.

Sometimes, this conversation will happen the day before your first appointment, on the telephone

### **What happens during treatment?**

Each time you attend we need to make sure we are treating the correct person. As you enter one of the treatment rooms, the radiographers will ask you to identify yourself by giving your name, date of birth and first line of your address.

The radiographers will check this information against your electronic treatment record.

You may be asked to change into a hospital gown before treatment. Alternatively, you may bring your own dressing gown with you. You will be asked to remove jewellery such as chains, necklaces and earrings. False teeth or dental plates will need to be removed for the treatment if they were removed when you had the mask made.

The radiographers will take you into the treatment room and position you on the treatment couch in the same position as your planning scan. All measurements for your treatment will then be set and checked.

This preparation may take quite a bit of time, and is often longer than the treatment itself. As part of this preparation, you will hear the radiographers checking some numbers and measurements. This is how they check your position. Once the radiographers are happy with your position, the treatment machine and imaging equipment will then be moved into position. The treatment machine will not touch you.

It is **very important** you remain still, breathing and swallowing as normal during your treatment, as during the CT scan.

The radiographers will leave the room, take a scan to check your treatment position and then start the treatment. Although you are alone in the room, you will be monitored on a TV via cameras during your treatment. If you need a radiographer during the treatment, raise your hand clearly and a radiographer will stop the machine and come into the room.

The machine will move around you and give you treatment from different angles. This is controlled by the radiographers outside. They may enter the room during the treatment. If so, please try to keep as still as possible. You will not feel anything during the treatment, but you will hear a buzzing noise as the treatment is delivered.

The total time of your first treatment will be approximately 20 minutes. Following treatments should take between 10 and 15 minutes.

Treatment is usually given Monday to Friday. Sometimes, treatment is given on bank holidays.

Once we have started your course of radiotherapy treatment, we aim to complete it without any additional breaks or days off.

Due to servicing of the machines it may sometimes be necessary to treat you on a different machine. Please be assured that all the machines give the same treatment.

It is very important that you do not miss treatment days as this may make your treatment less effective. If you feel you are unable to attend for any reason please discuss the problem with a radiographer.

Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive and it is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children, after treatment.

## **Use of steroids with your radiotherapy**

Brain metastases or secondary deposits cause inflammation and swelling around those deposits. The oncologist may prescribe steroids, at the point of diagnosis, to be continued during radiotherapy and then the dose gradually reduced once radiotherapy treatment has finished.

Your oncologist will discuss a plan and schedule for steroids with you before completion of radiotherapy, if required.

## **Benefits of steroids**

Will reduce inflammation and swelling around the brain metastases which will help to reduce headaches.

Steroids can make you feel better in general.

## **Possible side effects of steroids**

Swelling of the face.

- Increase in blood sugar.
- Gastric irritation.
- Weakness in the legs.
- Increased appetite.

## **Possible side effects of radiotherapy**

Side effects and their intensity will vary from patient to patient – everyone is different and reacts differently to treatment. It is important you keep the radiographers informed of any side effects that you experience.

Most side effects may continue 2-3 weeks after your treatment is completed. Not everyone will experience all of the side-effects listed here. If you do experience any of the following side-effects do not

worry, they are a normal reaction to treatment and are temporary. Please inform staff of how you are feeling so that they can advise and treat you.

- **Fatigue (chronic tiredness):** Radiotherapy can make you feel very tired. The tiredness may start during your treatment and continue for a number of weeks or months after treatment. You should allow extra time for a rest, for example an afternoon nap. If possible spread your chores out over the week. There is no reason why you shouldn't continue with your usual daily activities just remember to take a rest in between.
- **Headaches:** Radiotherapy may cause some swelling around the tumour at first, this can make your symptoms a little worse and some patients can experience headaches, and nausea. A couple of weeks after treatment you should notice that your symptoms will start to improve. If you find that you are in pain, ask the radiographers for support. They will arrange for you to see a health care professional who may prescribe some medication to help.
- **Hair loss:** You will lose your hair in the area that is being treated. Hair may begin to grow back a few months after the treatment is over. Hair re-growth may be a little patchy, particularly when it first starts to re-grow. Sometimes, hair grows back with a slightly different colour and texture and perhaps not as thickly as before. In the meantime, hats, wigs or hairpieces are some practical suggestions for coping with hair loss. Please ask a member of staff to discuss this with you, as there is a wig service available.
- **Washing your hair:** Once radiotherapy has started you may wash your hair very gently with lukewarm water. Baby shampoo may be used. Dry the hair and scalp very gently using a soft towel. Do not rub your head or use a hair dryer.
- **Sickness:** The treatment may make you feel nauseous or cause vomiting. To treat/prevent this, we may prescribe anti-sickness medication to alleviate this. If you continue to feel nauseous,

please let the radiographers, your nurse or consultant know so we can suggest another anti-sickness medication to try.

- **Food aversion caused by symptoms:** It is not unusual during your treatment to experience nausea that can result in food aversion. Eating regular small meals and drinking plenty of fluids will help to reduce nausea.  
Fizzy drinks are particularly helpful, as are drinks and biscuits containing ginger. If the smell of food is causing nausea, try eating cold foods.
- **Skin reaction:** For about 2 weeks after your radiotherapy treatment your scalp may become dry, itchy, red and tender. It is advisable to protect your head from both the sun and cold weather. You may want to wear a hat. You will find it more comfortable to have a hat made of natural fibres, e.g. cotton or silk, while you are having the treatment.

## Other side effects

Some patients may notice short-term memory loss.

## Contact details

Radiotherapy:	0118 322 7872
<b>email:</b> <a href="mailto:radiotherapy.planning@nhs.net"><u>radiotherapy.planning@nhs.net</u></a>	
Consultant Palliative Radiographer	07385 398 095
Your Oncology Nurse Specialist:	0118 322 _____
Berkshire Cancer Centre Clinic:	0118 322 7888 (9am-5pm)
Macmillan Cancer Information Centre:	0118 322 8700

## **Further information**

- Macmillan Support Line. Call free on 0808 808 00 00 (7 days a week 8am to 8pm). [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- The Newbury and District Cancer Care Trust for people living in West Berkshire [www.newburycancercare.org.uk](http://www.newburycancercare.org.uk)
- Shine Cancer Support for 20s 30s 40s  
[info@shinecancersupport.co.uk](mailto:info@shinecancersupport.co.uk)
- Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust PALS Team: 0118 322 8338 [PALS@royalberkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

## **Notes**

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

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

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