

Contraception and pregnancy during cancer treatment

Information for patients



Leeds Cancer
Centre

This leaflet explains why it is important that you **are not** pregnant before starting treatment, and you or your partner **do not become** pregnant, during your treatment.

This leaflet is for:

- all women who are still fertile and are having chemotherapy, immunotherapy or radiotherapy, and
- for men who are, or may be, sexually active with women who are of child bearing potential during their cancer treatment.

During your treatment you should avoid unprotected sex. This is because women must not be pregnant when having chemotherapy, immunotherapy or radiotherapy and men should not father children whilst receiving treatment due to an increased risk of causing miscarriage or damage to the developing baby. Being pregnant also prevents you having certain tests and scans to monitor your cancer. It is also important to not become pregnant for a period of time after treatment is complete to allow any damaged eggs or sperm to recover. This may vary depending on the treatment that you have.

Please discuss this with your doctor.

It is safest to use a barrier contraception such as the condom or cap during intercourse to prevent a pregnancy.

Side-effects from treatment, such as sickness or diarrhoea, can make the contraceptive pill less effective. Using a condom protects your partner in case there is any chemotherapy in semen or vaginal fluid in the first few days after treatment and reduces the risk of infection.

If you have any questions relating to this please feel free to raise them in your consultations with the medical or nursing staff.

You should have a discussion regarding risk of pregnancy when you sign a consent form with the doctor in clinic before starting chemotherapy, immunotherapy and radiotherapy. If you know you are pregnant or are breast feeding before you start cancer treatment or you or your partner become pregnant during treatment let your medical team or nurse specialist know straight away. They will explain risks and benefits of treatment. You may have to stop treatment whilst pregnant which could affect it's effectiveness and your health.

This can be a difficult and distressing time especially if you have to make decisions about continuing with a pregnancy. You can always discuss this with your medical or nursing team or speak with Leeds Cancer Support (details on page 7).

Pregnancy testing is always available if there is any possibility you may be pregnant at any time.

When will I be asked about pregnancy?

Chemotherapy and immunotherapy

The nurse will ask you about whether you might be pregnant and check you understand the need for contraception at your initial pre treatment assessment. Chemotherapy can reduce fertility in both women and men however you may remain fertile whilst on treatment. Please follow the contraceptive advice given throughout all your chemotherapy or immunotherapy treatment.

If you think at any point during your chemotherapy or immunotherapy that you may be pregnant it is important that you discuss this with the nurse or doctor and get a pregnancy test.

You will not routinely be asked before each chemotherapy or immunotherapy treatment so **it is your responsibility to raise any concerns.**

Radiotherapy

Radiographers will ask you about pregnancy or breastfeeding before your planning scan. If you have not signed a consent form, the radiographers will ask you to sign a form to confirm you are not pregnant, before your scan. When you start your radiotherapy the radiographers will ask you again if it is possible you may be pregnant.

If you suspect that you may have become pregnant you must inform the radiographers before your radiotherapy. Treatment cannot be given if you are pregnant.

Chemoradiotherapy

You will be asked about pregnancy as detailed in the sections above for chemotherapy and immunotherapy and radiotherapy.

Radionuclide (Unsealed Source) Therapy - You will be asked about pregnancy at your first clinic appointment before you attend for treatment. Radionuclide Therapy staff will ask you again on the day of your treatment and each time you attend for a follow-up scan.

At each treatment or follow-up scan you will be asked to sign a statement to say that you are not pregnant or breastfeeding.

You will also be given advice on avoiding pregnancy for a period of time after your treatment (usually 15 months). **It is important that you follow this guidance.**

When might I be offered a pregnancy test?

You will be offered a pregnancy test if you answer **Yes** to any of the following questions:

- Do you have irregular periods?
- Have you had unprotected sex since your last menstrual period?
- Have you missed a contraceptive pill or taken antibiotics during your last menstrual cycle?
- Has your barrier contraceptive failed (condom or cap)?

If at any point during your treatment you think that you may be pregnant you **must** tell the doctors, nurses or radiographers immediately and you will be offered a pregnancy test.

Further advice and support

We recognise this may be a very sensitive topic for you, please speak to your doctor, nurse or radiographer if you have any concerns about the issues raised in this leaflet.

The effects of cancer treatments on fertility and sexual function are not discussed in this leaflet, however we recognise they are important and there is separate information available.

More information can be found from:

Leeds Cancer Support

Leeds Cancer Support is here to help you and your family. We aim to offer high quality information, advice and support, to patients, families and friends.

Level -2 Information Lounge Radiotherapy Department (8am-6pm)	Tel: 0113 206 7603 Monday - Friday
Level 1 Information Centre Outpatients Unit (10am-4pm)	Tel: 0113 206 8816 Monday - Friday
The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre (10am-4pm)	Tel: 0113 206 6499 Monday - Friday

They can all be emailed on: leedsth-tr.cancersupport@nhs.net

Macmillan Cancer Support

Freephone: 0808 808 0000, 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday
A textphone service is available for deaf and hard of hearing people on **108001 0808 808 0000**.
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research UK

website: www.cancerresearchuk.org



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