

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 patients who are still fertile and are having chemotherapy, immunotherapy, targeted drug treatment or radiotherapy.
- This includes all patients who are able to get pregnant or are able to make a partner pregnant.

You should use reliable contraception during your treatment and avoid unprotected sex that could lead to pregnancy. This is because chemotherapy, targeted drugs, immunotherapy and radiotherapy can damage an unborn baby at the early stages of development.

It is also important to not become pregnant for a period of time after chemotherapy, targeted drugs, immunotherapy and radiotherapy is completed. The treatments can cause mutations in eggs and sperm which could lead to abnormalities in development of a baby if a pregnancy starts during or shortly after treatment. This time depends on the treatment that you have had. You will get specific information from your medical team. Being pregnant also may prevent you being able to have some tests and scans used to monitor cancer during and after treatment.

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 and hormone contraception is not recommended with some types of cancer. Using a condom also protects your partner if 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, targeted drugs, 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 discuss risks and benefits of your treatment.

You may have to stop treatment whilst pregnant which could affect its 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?

If you are on chemotherapy, targeted drugs or 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 however you may still be able to get pregnant or make a partner pregnant whilst on treatment. Please follow the contraceptive advice given throughout all your chemotherapy, targeted drug or immunotherapy treatment.

If you think at any point during your treatment 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 appointment, so it is your responsibility to raise any concerns.

If you are having radiotherapy

Radiographers will ask you about pregnancy status 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 the course of 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.

If you are having 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. 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.

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.

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)?

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

Maggie's Centre

If you or someone you love has cancer you may have lots of questions. Maggie's is a warm, welcoming place where you can meet people who are experiencing similar things to you.

You may also be able to find support groups specific to your needs and get advice and information from their professional staff.

You don't need an appointment and all support is free.

Open Monday to Friday 9.00 am - 5.00pm. **Tel: 0113 457 8364**

Address: St James's Hospital (next to the multi-storey carpark), Alma Street, Leeds LS9 7BE

Email: leeds@maggiescentres.org

www.maggiescentres.org

National support organisations

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

Mummy's Star

Cancer support in and around pregnancy | birth | loss | beyond

Website: www.mummystar.org

Cancer Research UK

website: www.cancerresearchuk.org



What did you think of your care?
Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/nhsleedsfft
Your views matter



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Developed by AM Kenny, and A Callister Chemotherapy Nurse Specialists and H Melling, Macmillan Advanced Radiotherapy Practitioner

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