Radiotherapy for skin lesions

Information for patients

Leeds Cancer Centre
This leaflet aims to help you understand more about radiotherapy to your skin.

The leaflet describes radiotherapy planning and treatment. It also explains the side-effects which you may experience during and after treatment.

Each person’s treatment will vary, so the information given is a general guide. The healthcare team looking after you will explain your treatment and the side-effects in detail. If you hear any words or phrases that you do not understand, please ask your doctor or a member of your healthcare team what it means. It does not matter how many times you ask.

Staff will make every effort to meet your individual needs or will direct you to the person who can help.

All your radiotherapy planning and treatment will take place in the Radiotherapy Department on Level -2, Bexley Wing, Leeds Cancer Centre (LS9 7TF).

**Radiotherapy reception Tel: 0113 206 8940**

Please do not bring any valuables into hospital with you as the Trust cannot accept liability for loss or theft.
What is radiotherapy?
Radiotherapy is the use of high energy x-rays and other types of radiation to treat cancer. The organs and tissues of the body are made up of tiny building blocks called cells. Radiotherapy causes damage to the cancer cells in the treated area. Although normal cells are affected, they can repair themselves and are able to recover.

Radiotherapy is a local treatment. This means it only affects the part of the body that is treated.

When you are having your radiotherapy you do not feel anything and it does not make you radioactive. You may hear a buzzing noise when the machine is switched on. It is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.

You will have your radiotherapy on a treatment machine called a linear accelerator, as shown here in the photograph. You will see your radiographers at each treatment session, and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have.
How often is it given?
Radiotherapy is usually given over one day to six weeks. This is a total of between 1-30 treatment days. Treatment is usually given daily, Monday to Friday; however your treatment may not start on a Monday.

You may need to be treated on a weekend during the day due to a bank holiday and we will let you know if this is the case. Your radiographer will be able to explain the details of your individual radiotherapy appointments.

Your treatment will usually be given as an outpatient.

Visiting us before your treatment
If you would like to visit the radiotherapy department before starting treatment, please call 0113 206 7603. This visit can be very useful as you can find out more information about radiotherapy, visit the hospital, tour the simulators and treatment areas and ask questions.

‘I was so pleased to see the machines before my treatment and the staff were so helpful and really put my mind at rest.’
Who will I meet?

Clinical Oncologist
This is a consultant who is a specialist in radiotherapy. They are responsible for prescribing and overseeing your treatment. You will see your consultant, or a member of their team, when your treatment is being planned. You may see them during your treatment as well.

Therapeutic radiographers
Radiotherapy is given by both male and female therapeutic radiographers who are highly trained in the accurate planning and delivery of radiotherapy treatment. You will see your radiographers at each treatment session and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Student radiographers
The radiotherapy department is a training centre for both male and female radiographers. They are supervised at all times. If you do not wish students to be present, please speak to a member of staff. This will not affect your treatment or care.

Mould Room technologists
If you need a mask making the staff in Mould Room will carefully guide you through the process. There is a leaflet available.

Patient support staff
If you have any concerns about having a mask please ask to see one of the patient support staff who can help you through the process.
Important advice before your treatment

Pregnancy

It is very important that women are not pregnant at the start of a course of radiotherapy and that they do not become pregnant during a course of radiotherapy because it can have an effect on the unborn child. Use an effective form of contraception, for example condoms, coil, depo injection or contraceptive pill.

For more information see the ‘Contraception and pregnancy during cancer treatment’ leaflet. Please do not hesitate to ask your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns about these issues.
Planning your treatment

Your first appointment for radiotherapy will be a planning appointment. This will be used to gather all the information we need to accurately plan your treatment. We will contact you by phone, with an appointment for your radiotherapy planning session. Directions to the hospital and transport arrangements will be discussed with you at this point.

At your first appointment you will see your Clinical Oncologist in the Princess Royal Suite (Planning Clinic). The oncologist will explain your treatment. This is an ideal opportunity for you to ask questions. If you have not previously consented to your treatment you will be asked to sign a consent form. Please do not wear make-up to cover the area when coming for your planning appointment. The oncologist needs to see the area to be treated clearly.

The area to be treated will be drawn around using a skin marker pen. These marks will be removed before you leave the department. A photograph and a template of the treatment area will be taken and used by the radiographers for each treatment. The template may be used to make an individual protective shield that outlines the treatment area.
What to bring with you:
• a list of all questions you may have;
• an up-to-date list of all the medications you are taking (including inhalers, sprays, vitamins or herbal products);
• any medication that you may need during your visit;
• something to eat and drink and something to occupy yourself with, as this first visit can be quite lengthy (up to two hours).

Mould Room
You may need to visit the Mould Room to have a perspex shell or wax mould made (shown here in the picture). If you have a mask made, you will need to wear the mask for treatment. This helps you stay in the right position.

You may need one or two visits to have your mask made. These appointments are usually a week apart. Please ask for the ‘Having a radiotherapy mask made’ information leaflet.

You may also need customised lead shielding to protect healthy parts of your face, such as your eyes; depending on the area that is being treated. Some patients may need “bolus” applied to their skin. This is a jelly-like material that helps in radiotherapy delivery.

If you require lead shielding or wax or bolus these will be applied during your treatment and removed before you leave the department.
Having your treatment

When you arrive for your treatment you should go to the main reception of the radiotherapy department. You will be given directions to your treatment machine. The radiographers will explain what will happen and answer any questions that you may have. You will be given a full list of all your treatment and clinic appointments.

Treatment is usually given daily, Monday to Friday however your treatment may start on any day of the week. Whenever possible you will be treated at the time of day that suits you, but this cannot always be arranged or guaranteed. There may be occasions when you may have a longer stay in the department or be asked to attend at a different time, for example to see your oncologist.

Depending on the area that needs treatment, you may need to undress and put on a gown; the radiographers discuss this with you when you first attend the department.
The treatment marks and any individual protective shielding will be checked. If the treatment is close to your eye, or involving your eyelid, you may need to wear a protective contact shield during treatment. This will be inserted after a local anaesthetic to the eye (a couple of anaesthetic drops are administered). Your eye will need to be covered for two hours after the treatment and so driving yourself to hospital should be avoided if you need to wear this type of eye shield.

You will be asked to stay as still as possible during the treatment but you should breathe and swallow normally. Once you are in the correct position the radiographers will leave the room to switch on the machine. You will only be alone for a few moments at a time. The radiographers will be watching you on a closed circuit TV (CCTV) monitor during treatment. The CCTV camera is not recording or saving any images. There is also an intercom system so the radiographers can talk to you.
The treatment only takes a few minutes but you will be in the treatment room for about 10-15 minutes. The machine stops automatically after your prescribed dose of treatment has been given. The radiographers can stop the machine at any time if needed. The treatment machine makes a buzzing sound when switched on. You do not feel anything.

*Do not try to sit up and get off the treatment couch until the radiographer says it is safe to do so.*

After the treatment is complete the radiographers will come back into the room and help you off the couch.

On some days the radiotherapy department may be busy and there may be a delay before your treatment. We will keep you informed of any delays, please see the information screens in the waiting areas. It may be a good idea to bring something to eat and drink with you, including any supplement drinks you have been asked to have and any medication you may need. There is a restaurant and café available on Level 0.

Your treatments will generally be on the same machine, although there may be days when this machine is being serviced and your treatment will be in a different room.

*It is very important that you do not miss treatment days as it may make your treatment less effective. If you feel you are unable to attend for any reason please telephone us so that we can discuss this with you. If you have any queries about your appointment times please discuss these with the radiotherapy co-ordinators on your treatment unit.*

*For appointment queries please telephone the radiotherapy reception desk 0113 206 8940 for further advice.*
Side-effects

Side-effects can be divided into short term (acute) effects, that happen during or soon after treatment, and long term effects occurring months or years later. Some side-effects are common, whilst others are rare. The area and amount of treatment given to you will affect which side-effects are most likely to happen to you. Your oncologist will discuss this with you. If you develop any radiotherapy side-effects you will be given advice and support by your healthcare team.

Short term side-effects from radiotherapy

Most side-effects are common and are temporary. Side-effects tend to build up from about the second week of treatment and will be at their worst at the end or just after the treatment course. They generally last a number of weeks or months after the treatment has finished.

Skin reactions

The skin in the treated area starts to redden or darken from the second week of treatment. It may become dry and itchy. Sometimes later in treatment it may peel and become weepy.

If you feel you must shave in the treatment area only use an electric razor with extreme care.

Before you go in for your treatment the radiographer will explain what will happen to your skin and how to look after it. They will also give you a leaflet to take home. The same will happen at the end of your treatment. If you are concerned about your skin reaction please talk to your radiograph- ers or contact the review clinic nursing staff in the Princess Royal Suite, telephone: 0113 206 7587.
**Tiredness (fatigue)**

Nearly all patients having radiotherapy will feel tired.

Be prepared to take things easy during treatment and allow for extra rests. There is a Macmillan information leaflet available and if you would like a copy, or support with your fatigue please ask a member of staff.

**Things you can do to help include:**

- Gentle exercise can help reduce the symptoms of fatigue.
- Having enough to drink can prevent tiredness from dehydration.
- Small meals or snacks eaten more often than three times a day may be easier to face.
- Try to get a good night’s sleep where possible, a daytime nap may help.
- Try to ‘pace’ yourself, listen to what your body is telling you, rest if you need to.
- Pick out the things that you enjoy, and try to accept help with other tasks.
- Little and often is the rule of thumb.

**Hair loss**

*Only hair in the treated area will stop growing and may fall out. Your doctor will tell you if you might lose your hair.*

Sometimes hair will not grow back after treatment.
Possible long term side-effects from radiotherapy

Long term skin changes:
Months after your radiotherapy treatment you will notice that the skin where you had the treatment appears paler and you might notice some fine blood vessels too. These changes can easily be covered up with make-up.

Other long term side-effects will depend on the exact details of your treatment.

If you are concerned about your risk of developing any of the following side-effects please speak to your consultant or specialist nurse.

Please note:
Please read the information leaflets enclosed with any medications used, this will explain any side-effects you may experience when taking them.

If you are at all concerned about any side-effects you are experiencing from your medication, please talk to your pharmacist, nurse specialist or GP.

Nutrition
It is important that you are well nourished and drink plenty of fluids during your treatment in order to keep you healthy and to help your body to heal.

How well you can eat and drink varies, depending upon where the cancer is and on the details of your treatment.
Research at Leeds Cancer Centre

Leeds Cancer Centre is a major centre for cancer research. You may be asked if you would like to help with some of the clinical studies. You are under no obligation to take part in any trials, and your treatment will not be affected in any way if you do not wish to take part.

If you do take part in a clinical trial you may meet a research nurse or radiographer who will be helping to run the trial.

Further information and support

If you have any questions please ask your hospital team. We all have our own ways of coping with difficulties.

Some people have a close network of family and friends who provide emotional support. Others would rather seek help from people who are not involved with their illness.

The following are also available as sources of information and support that you may wish to use.

Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS)

Your CNS (Keyworker) is available to discuss any aspect of your treatment with you. You may be seen by a CNS before your treatment. This is to offer support and advice about the practicalities and effects of your treatment and answer any questions you may want to ask.

Your CNS can also assess and discuss any physical, psychological, social, occupational and spiritual needs that you may have. They can refer you to other services if needed, for instance, benefits advice.
If you are not seen by a Skin Cancer CNS before or during your radiotherapy treatment please be assured that if you do have any questions or concerns about your treatment or any other related issues you can contact the Skin Cancer Nurse Specialist Team on the number below

**Skin Cancer Nurse Specialist Team**
Jenny Fallon and Tracy Wall
**Tel:** 0113 392 4378

**Macmillan Specialist Radiographer and Macmillan Radiotherapy Nurse Specialist**
Sometimes people need more help if they are feeling depressed, very anxious or are having problems with their treatment or accepting their diagnosis. If this is the case you may benefit from seeing the Macmillan radiographer or nurse specialist.

Your oncologist, radiographer or nurse can refer you at any point before or during your treatment.
Local Support Services

Leeds Cancer Support

Leeds Cancer Support complements care provided by your clinical team. We offer access to information and a wide range of support, in a welcoming environment for you, your family and friends.

We can be found in the information lounges in Bexley Wing and also in the purpose built Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre

The Centre is on the St James’s Hospital site and offers a variety of support services including complementary and supportive therapies. These therapies include Reiki, relaxation and visualisation, hand and foot massage and many others. We also offer a weekly exercise class and a monthly support group. You can just drop in for a coffee and a chat anytime.

Contact numbers for Leeds Cancer Support

*Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department*
Open from 8.00am - 6.00pm Tel: (0113) 206 7603

*Information Centre Level 1 Outpatients Department*
Open from 9.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 8816

*Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre*
Open from 10.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: (0113) 206 6498

All the above services can be emailed on: leedsth-tr.cancersupport@nhs.net
National Support Organisations

Macmillan Cancer Support
Freephone: 0808 808 0000, 8am to 8pm seven days a week
A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people on 18001 0808 808 0000
Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

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 427 8364
Address: St James’s Hospital (next to the multi storey car park), Alma Street, Leeds LS9 7BE
Email: leeds@maggiescentres.org
Website: maggiescentres.org

Stopping smoking
NHS Free Smoking Helpline: 0300 123 1044 Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 11am to 4pm.
Website: www.nhs.uk/smokefree
Car Parking

- Parking for radiotherapy planning and treatment is free.
- On entering the car park take a ticket and park as usual (disabled parking spaces are on Level 0).
- When exiting use the left hand lane next to the ticket office. Take your parking ticket and appointment letter to the attendant. They will process your ticket so that when you insert it at the barrier no charge will be made.
- If you need assistance or are unable to leave your car please press the button on the barrier.

St James’s University Hospital site plan
Map of Leeds showing Leeds General Infirmary (LGI) and St James’s University Hospital (SJUH)

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

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