



Information for  
patients and  
carers

# Radiotherapy for primary breast cancer

## Details of your treatment

This leaflet is designed for patients who are receiving radiotherapy to the breast, chest wall and/or lymph nodes. If you have recently been diagnosed with breast cancer, it is normal to experience a wide range of emotions.

Your partner, family or friends might also find this leaflet useful to understand what you are currently experiencing so that they can help to support you.

### What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is a specialist treatment that uses precise, carefully measured doses of radiation to treat cancer.

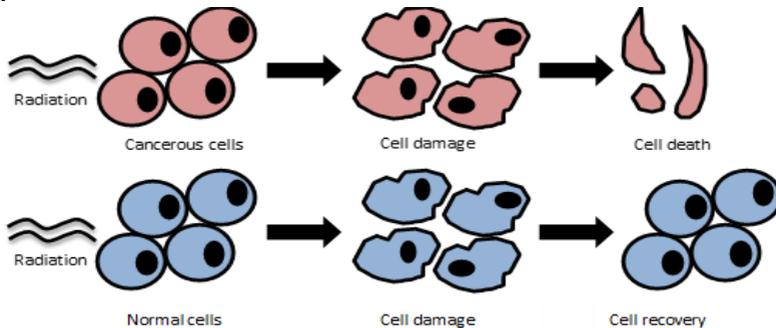
Treatment is given by highly trained radiographers, using specialised machines known as linear accelerators. The radiographers and planning staff work closely with your consultant and/or advanced clinical practitioner (ACP) to plan and deliver your treatment.

## How does radiotherapy work?

Radiotherapy uses high energy x-rays to treat breast cancer. The X-ray beams are directed at the treatment area and cause damage to cells in the treatment area.

Normal healthy cells can recover from this damage, however abnormal cancer cells cannot.

Radiotherapy is therefore given to kill the cancer cells in the targeted area and reduce the chances of your cancer recurring or delay its progression. The treatment itself is painless and there is nothing to feel.



## Will I be radioactive?

If you are having external beam radiotherapy you **will not be radioactive**. It is safe to be in close contact with people, including pregnant people, babies and children.

## When will my radiotherapy start?

After your consultant or ACP has discussed your treatment options with you, you will receive an appointment to attend your radiotherapy planning scan appointment. You will be given your first radiotherapy treatment appointment when you attend for your planning scan.

The planning scan appointment is used to plan your radiotherapy treatment; this can take anywhere from a few days up to 3 weeks. Please don't be alarmed if you feel there is a long time between these appointments, this is due to the complex nature of the planning process.

If you require certain times and/or hospital transport, please let a member of staff know before you start treatment. The radiotherapy appointment team will do their best to accommodate your request, however this cannot always be guaranteed.

## Before your treatment

### Pre treatment

At the planning appointment you will have a CT scan of your chest. The treatment planning team use this scan to accurately plan your radiotherapy treatment, whilst ensuring that surrounding areas close to the treatment area don't receive more radiation than necessary.

You may need to have a dye injection for the scan, known as contrast. Your radiographer will discuss this with you if it is required. Please note that if you need to have the dye injection, we ask that you stay in the department for up to 30 minutes afterwards. This is to ensure you are feeling ok after the dye injection. This will not be required for treatment.

Some patients may be more suitable for a treatment technique that requires holding your breath for treatment, if this is the case the team will discuss this with you in detail.

Please do not be alarmed if your planning scan is delayed due to your surgical wound not being appropriately healed or due to the length of time from your last cycle of chemotherapy. These are both common and valid reasons to delay your scan, and please contact the department or your specialist nurse if you have any concerns.

## During the scan

For the scan radiographers will position you as required for treatment, which includes having one or both arms raised above your head. It is important you can manage this position for 15/20 minutes as this will be required for each treatment. You will have to be uncovered for your scan, but radiographers will always maintain your dignity.

After the scan radiographers may give you two to three small tattoo dots, depending on your treatment site using a small needle and some ink the dot is no bigger than a freckle. The tattoo will help the radiographers get you in the correct position for treatment every day and ensure accuracy of the treatment. Tattoos may not be needed for all treatment methods, the radiographers will discuss this with you before your scan.

## Radiotherapy Treatment

Before your first radiotherapy session, a radiographer will discuss the treatment process and answer any questions you may have, as well as giving you your full list of appointments

It is very important that you don't miss any of your radiotherapy treatments, as it can make the treatment less effective. If you are feeling too ill to attend your treatment, please call the department and speak to a member of the team to see if we can assist.

For your radiotherapy treatment, you may be asked to change into a gown in a changing cubicle. You will then lie down in the same position as when you came for the planning scan. For some techniques, your body contour may need to be monitored during treatment. This means you will need to be uncovered for your treatment, but the team will ensure your dignity is always maintained.

The radiographers will then position you for treatment, ensuring you are in the perfect position. Once they are happy with their checks, radiographers will leave the room and begin treatment, there is nothing to see or feel during treatment. The treatment appointment should take approximately 15-30 minutes, but this can vary.

## Treatment reviews

Depending on your treatment regime, you may have scheduled review clinics with your consultant or the review team, within the department or over the phone.

These review clinics are for you to discuss any concerns or side effects that you may be experiencing from treatment.

The review clinics are scheduled on specific times and days and will be scheduled on your treatment appointment list.

## Staff you will meet

We are a mixed gender department and treatment will be given by male and female staff members.

Royal Preston Hospital is a teaching hospital which means that we train and support undergraduate and postgraduate radiotherapy students and medical students. Students take an active part in treatments and are closely monitored by qualified staff.

## Side effects

Most people will experience side effects of radiotherapy, although the severity will vary from person to person.

Side effects don't usually happen straight away but start to develop around a week into your treatment, and they will continue after treatment finishes.

You will be given advice by the review team and treatment radiographers on how to manage any side effects.

### Short term side effects

- Skin reactions
- Fatigue
- Breast swelling/pain
- Shoulder discomfort
- Lymphoedema

### Late side effects

The late effects or long-term effects of radiotherapy can occur several months and years after the radiotherapy has finished. This is dependent on your treatment site and will be monitored and managed at your routine follow up appointments.

## After your treatment

After you have completed your course of radiotherapy your consultant or review team will explain your follow-up procedure. It is important to be aware any side effects can continue to get worse after treatment but should have improved by your follow up appointment which is usually 6-8 weeks after treatment finishes.

You will receive an appointment through the post to see your consultant or advanced clinical practitioner around six to eight weeks after completion of your radiotherapy.

Please remember that you are free to contact the department at any time after your treatment has finished should you have any concerns or questions, contact information will be on your end of treatment summary, this is usually given to you on your last day of treatment.

Returning to normal life takes time and it is a gradual process which involves a period of readjustment, all of which will be individual to you. It is not possible to be specific about the amount of time it will take each person. You can return to work as soon as you feel well enough. This can vary between patients depending on how physically demanding your job is.

## Smoking

It has been proven that smoking can make your radiotherapy side effects worse and reduce the effectiveness of the treatment. It is important that you reduce or stop smoking whilst on treatment.

We understand that this may be difficult at such a stressful time and staff are very open to discussing this with you and offering you the support you may need. There are contact details for the Lancashire and South Cumbria “Quit Squad” at the end of this leaflet.

## Self-care

It is important to continue to regularly check your breasts/chest and armpits for new lumps or changes to the nipple. Make an appointment to see your GP if you have any concerns. You should also see your GP if you develop shortness of breath, a cough or new bone pain.

## Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact: Radiotherapy Reception **(01772) 522900**

Appointments **(01772) 522752**

## Sources of further information

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)

### Stop smoking services

<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/find-your-local-stop-smoking-service/>

### Macmillan at Rosemere Cancer Centre

<https://tinyurl.com/38z3d2fy>

**(01772) 523709**

### After Radiotherapy to the Breast and Chest Wall

Available via the QR code or in the **Radiotherapy** section of the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals website:

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/cancer-patient-information-leaflets](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/cancer-patient-information-leaflets)

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:



[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets)

**Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.**

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking this will include Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal and the opportunity to speak to a nurse or advisor from the specialist Tobacco and Alcohol Care Team.

If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/cancer-patient-information-leaflets](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/cancer-patient-information-leaflets)

**Gujarati:**

આ માહિતીને સમજવામાં સહાયતા જોઈતી હોય તો કૃપા કરીને પૂછો. આ માહિતી મોટા છપાણામાં અને અન્ય ભાષામાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરી શકાય છે.

**Romanian:**

Vă rugăm să întrebați dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru înțelegerea acestor informații. Aceste informații pot fi puse la dispoziție în format mare și în alte limbi.”

**Polish:**

Poinformuj nas, jeśli potrzebna jest ci pomoc w zrozumieniu tych informacji. Informacje te można również udostępnić dużym drukiem oraz w innych językach

**Punjabi:**

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਸਮਝਣ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਦਦ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਛੋ। ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਟੈਂਟ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।

**Urdu:**

دو سر ی زبانوں او ر بیڑ ی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے یئل مدد ی ضرورت ہے تو ییچھپا یں یبھابی دست بو یسکت ہے براے مہر یبان پو یچھدی۔ معلومات

**Arabic:**

مطبوعه بأ ح ر ف ك ب ي ر ة و بلغات إذا كنت تريد مساعدة في فهم هذه المعلومات يُرجى أن تطلب أخرى يمكن تو فير هذه المعلومات

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**Division:** Surgery

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