

Information for patients and carers

Superficial and Electron Radiotherapy Treatment

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue. The top band is a light blue, the middle band is a medium blue, and the bottom band is a dark blue.

Details of your Treatment

This leaflet is designed for patients who are receiving superficial or electron radiotherapy. If you have recently been diagnosed 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.

The information in this booklet should not be seen as a replacement for talking with the radiographers, specialist nurses and doctors involved in your treatment and care.

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. The radiographers and planning staff work closely with your consultant and/or advanced clinical practitioner to plan and deliver your treatment.

Radiotherapy Treatment Options

There are different types of radiotherapy used to in the treatment of skin cancer: Superficial or Electrons.

Your consultant or Advanced Clinical Practitioner will advise you which radiotherapy treatment (superficial or electron treatment) is appropriate for you. This will depend on the size, site and depth of the skin that needs treating.

Your treatment can be given on one of two machines. Both machines use high energy x-rays to treat the area. Details below:

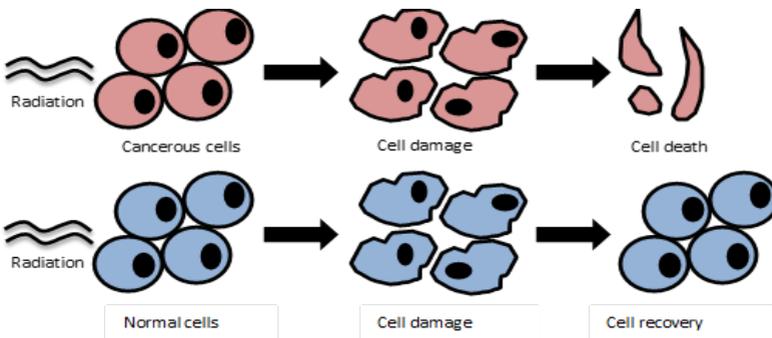
- 1) **Superficial Treatment** – Uses X-rays that do not travel far into your skin before they are absorbed. During treatment a thin lead shield may be used to protect the healthy tissue around the area being treated. This will be placed on the skin before each treatment and will be removed after treatment.
- 2) **Electron Treatment** – Uses electron beams that can travel deeper into the skin and underlying tissues. This treatment is given on a machine called a Linear Accelerator.

How does Radiotherapy Work?

Radiotherapy use x-rays to treat 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?

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 advanced clinical practitioner has discussed your treatment options with you, you will receive an appointment to attend your radiotherapy planning appointment.

You will be given your first radiotherapy treatment appointment when you attend for your planning appointment.

The planning appointment is used to plan your radiotherapy treatment. The time between your planning appointment and start of treatment can take anywhere from a few days up to 3 weeks. Please do not 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

At the planning appointment a team consisting of your consultant or Advanced Clinical Practitioner, physicists and radiographers will decide the area they would like to include in the treatment field and the most appropriate method of treatment.

The treatment planning team use this appointment to accurately plan your radiotherapy treatment, whilst ensuring that surrounding areas close to the treatment area do not receive more radiation than necessary.

At your planning appointment, your consultant or Advanced Clinical Practitioner will use a pen to mark the area of your skin that needs to be treated.

We will take measurements, a tracing and with your permission a photograph of this area. These records help us to make sure your treatment is accurate each day and can be useful at any follow-up appointments in the future.

If the treatment is to your face, we may also need to make a small lead mask or lead cut-out. This will rest on your face and will help the staff get you in the same position for every treatment. This also helps shape the radiotherapy beam and will protect the surrounding skin. The radiographers will discuss this with you in more detail if this is required for your treatment.

Radiotherapy Treatment

Before your first radiotherapy treatment, 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 do not 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.

The radiographers will then make sure you are in the correct position for treatment. Once the radiographers have completed their checks, they leave the room to start the treatment. Only the patient can be in the treatment room when the machine is delivering treatment, but staff will monitor you via CCTV.

The radiographers will adjust the radiotherapy machine which will be touching your skin. Try to keep as still as possible.

The radiographers will then begin treatment from outside of the room. This will only take several minutes and there is nothing to see or feel during treatment. The whole treatment process takes approximately 15 minutes.

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.

Only the area being treated will be affected.

Side effects do not usually happen straight away but start to develop around a week into your treatment, and they will continue after treatment finishes. The area may take 6 to 8 weeks or more to heal.

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

Possible short term side effects include:

- Tiredness and fatigue
- The area may become red, sore and itchy 5 - 10 days after starting treatment. If your treatment is short and completed within 1 - 2 weeks, these side-effects may occur after you have completed radiotherapy.
- The skin in the treatment area may scab and a new scab may then form in its place. This may be repeated several times and is part of the healing process
- The area may be sore and there can be some bleeding.
- If there is hair within the treatment area, you may notice some temporary or permanent thinning or hair loss.

Skin Care

As skin reactions are a common side effect to radiotherapy, you may be advised to use certain moisturisers/creams throughout treatment. The most suitable product to use may change as your treatment progresses. You will be advised by radiographers and during your review appointments regarding skin care.

For further skin care information please refer to the 'Radiotherapy Skin Reactions – Information for Patients' information leaflet.

- It is best not to cover the treatment area with a bandage or plaster. If the area is weeping, bleeding or unsightly, cover with a non-adhesive dressing suitable for wet wounds. Please do not put sticking plaster on the treatment area.
- If you suspect you have skin infection (greenish/yellowish discharge) please contact your GP or the radiotherapy review team.

Late Side Effects

The late 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. Long term side effects also vary in frequency, and this will also be explained during the consent process.

- You may notice skin texture and skin colour changes in the treatment area
- You may lose your hair permanently in the treatment area
- Small blood vessels in the treatment area can become visible (telangiectasia)
- Increased sensitivity of the treated skin to the sun and changes in temperature
- Rarely a non-healing ulcer may form and will require a long-term dressing or a small operation to remove it.

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 worsen 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 around 6 - 8 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.

You will be given a summary letter towards the end of your radiotherapy treatment containing contact information for the department.

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 Smokefree Lancashire.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

Radiotherapy Reception **(01772) 522923**

Appointments **(01772) 522931**

Transport **(01772) 522295**

If you would like to watch a short information video about radiotherapy, please scan the QR code below.



Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware

<https://bepartofresearch.nihr.ac.uk/>

Stop Smoking Services

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

Alcohol Advice

<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/>

Macmillan at Rosemere Cancer Centre

<https://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/macmillan-cancer-information-and-support-services>

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www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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 Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.

This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.

Our patient information group review our leaflets regularly, if you feel you would like to feedback on this information or join our reading group please contact on email address:

patientexperienceandinvolem@LTHTR.nhs.uk

Department: Radiotherapy

Division: Surgery

Production date: January 2026

Review date: January 2028

Document Code and version: CA253 V5