Lancashire Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Information for patients and carers

Radiotherapy for Oesophageal Cancer

Details of your treatment

This leaflet is designed for patients who are receiving radiotherapy to the oesophagus. If you have recently been diagnosed with 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. 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 known as linear accelerators. The radiographers and planning staff work closely with your consultant and/or specialist nurse to plan and deliver your treatment.

How does radiotherapy work?

Radiotherapy uses high energy x-rays to treat oesophageal 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, whereas 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 (coming back) 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 specialist nurse has discussed your treatment options with you, you will receive an appointment to attend your radiotherapy planning scan. You will be given your first radiotherapy treatment appointment when you attend for your planning scan.

The planning scan is used to plan your radiotherapy treatment; this can take 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.

Chemotherapy

Some patients will have chemotherapy alongside radiotherapy. You will attend a pre-chemo assessment before starting radiotherapy where relevant information and advice will be given to you.

Before your treatment

Pre-treatment

At the planning appointment you will have a CT scan of your thorax (chest area). The treatment planning team use this scan to accurately plan your radiotherapy treatment, whilst ensuring that surrounding areas close to the treatment area do not 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 fine after the dye injection. This will not be required for treatment.

During the scan

For the scan radiographers will position you as required for treatment, this can vary depending on which part of your oesophagus is being treated, this will be explained to you on the day by the team.

You will either be laid on your back with your arms above your head holding onto arm supports or a thermoplastic mask will be made. The mask is made from a specialised thermoplastic material which turns soft when heated in a water bath. The radiographers will drape this over your face, neck and shoulders and mould it to the contours of your face and body while it cools and hardens.

Support will be given under your knees to aid comfort. It is important you can manage this position for around 15 minutes. The radiographers need to access your chest area, but you will be covered as much as possible, and the radiographers will always maintain your dignity.

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 do not miss any of your radiotherapy appointments, 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.

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 firstly complete a CT scan, to verify your position and you may feel the treatment couch move as they make minor adjustments to ensure you are in the correct position for treatment.

Once the radiographers have completed their checks, they will leave the treatment room to start the treatment. The treatment 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 certain days and will be on your treatment appointment list.

Blood Tests

Some patients may require weekly blood tests whilst undergoing radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy. Reminders will be on your appointment schedule, and the blood clinic is open from 8:00am - 5:00pm Monday to Friday and is located at the main entrance of Royal Preston Hospital.

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 do not usually happen straight away but may 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

Short term side effects start during or shortly after radiotherapy and usually resolve within two to six months. These side effects vary in frequency and will be explained in more detail during the consent process.

- Fatigue
- Skin reactions
- Increased saliva/mucus production
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty and/or pain swallowing
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Nausea or vomiting
- Abdominal discomfort

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.

- Ongoing fatigue
- Oesophageal stricture
- Oesophageal dysmotility (change in swallowing)
- Fibrosis (scarring) of underlying oesophageal and lung

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 the Lancashire and South Cumbria “Quit Squad” at the end of this leaflet.

Contact details

If you are worried about side effects or need further advice, please contact the Radiotherapy Review Team:

Telephone: 01772 522905
Please leave a message on the answerphone and a member of the team will contact you.

Email: Radiotherapy.ReviewTeam@lthtr.nhs.uk
We aim to get back to you by the next working day.

Should you require further advice or information please contact:
Radiotherapy Reception **(01772) 522900**
Appointments **(01772) 522752**

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

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/

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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:
patientexperienceandinvolvem@LTHTR.nhs.uk

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