



Information for
patients and
carers

**Feminine Care Following Pelvic
Radiotherapy**

Introduction

This leaflet provides advice to ladies who have had a course of radiotherapy to the pelvic area. If your cervix, uterus (womb) or endometrium (lining of the womb) is included in the treatment area they may be affected by your treatment.

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.

Vaginal changes

Pelvic radiotherapy can make the tissue in your vagina less stretchy and reduce the normal lubricating secretions. As a result, you may notice that your vagina becomes drier and it may feel as though it has narrowed. This is probably caused by changes to the vaginal tissue and loss of normal lubricating secretions. If you have had gynaecology surgery it is also possible that the top part of your vagina has been removed, so it may also feel shorter.

Minimising vaginal changes

It is important to minimise any further vaginal changes by keeping your vagina tissue flexible.

- This will help to ensure you are comfortable during intercourse. Even if you are not currently sexually active, this may change in the future so minimising vaginal changes is important for this.
- Your vagina may need to be examined at future appointments. It is important that you are as comfortable as possible during these examinations and minimising vaginal changes should help achieve this.

How to minimise vaginal changes

There are two methods of keeping vaginal tissue flexible and supple. You can use either method or a combination of the two.

Vaginal Dilators

These are smooth, plastic tubes which can be inserted into your vagina. These are provided to suitable patients by the radiographers or specialist nurse. Start using the dilator 4-6 weeks after finishing your radiotherapy or brachytherapy. You should not feel any pain or discomfort when using the dilators. We recommend using the smallest dilator first, and then gradually increase to the size you are most comfortable with. Most women can progress to size 2 quite quickly. The dilator should be used daily for the first 6 weeks. After that 2-3 times a week is adequate. This can be reduced further or even stopped if you are regularly sexually active. If you are not sexually active vaginal dilation may be continued indefinitely.

There is information on how to use the dilator within the pack you will receive in radiotherapy. We advise that you use a water-soluble lubricant, such as 'Sylk' or 'Yes'. These can be prescribed by your GP or purchased from a pharmacy.

We understand this is a very personal area and it can sometimes be difficult to discuss. If you would like more information, please ask during one of your appointments. Your specialist nurse or a member of the radiotherapy review team will be happy to help. If it is not something we can help with directly we may be able to put you in contact with another professional who can assist you.

Sexual Intercourse

It is safe for you and your partner to have intercourse when you both feel ready. It is common for either partner to feel worried or anxious at this time so do not be surprised if the physical aspect of your relationship has suffered recently.

Cancer is not contagious and cannot be passed onto your partner. Do not worry if you experience a little discomfort and a slight spotting of blood after intercourse, this is probably caused by the fact that your vagina is dry and inflamed. This should settle as the tissues in the vagina are designed to expand. Try using a water-soluble lubricant such as “Sylk” or “Yes” to make intercourse easier.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

Radiotherapy Reception: (01772) 522900

Transport queries: (01772) 522901

Radiotherapy Appointment Queries: (01772) 522931

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.be.macmillan.org.uk/Downloads/CancerInformation/LivingWithAndAfterCancer/MAC13944pelviceffectswomenE2lowrespdf20151222.pdf

www.community.macmillan.org.uk/cancer_types/womb-cancer-forum/f/womb-cancer-forum/122858/vaginal-dilators

www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/treatment/radiotherapy/side-effects/abdominal-or-pelvic-radiotherapy

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/sex-and-cancer

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

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

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site.

On 31 May 2017 Lancashire Teaching Hospitals became a smoke-free organisation. From that date 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 including Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal.

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.

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 ਵੱਲ ਮਦਦ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਛੋ। ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਿੰਟ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵੱਲ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।

Urdu:

دو سر ی زبانوں او ر بڑی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے بے ل مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو ییچھیا جس ییہ ابی دست ہو یسکت ہے براے مہر یان یو ییچھہی۔ معلومات

Arabic:

مطبوعة بأحرف كبيرة و بلغات إذا كنت تريد مساعدة في فهم هذه لمعلومات يُرجى أن تطلب أخرى يمكن تو فيير هذه المعلوما

Department: Radiotherapy

Division: Surgery

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