



Information for  
patients and  
carers

# Radiotherapy to the Oesophagus

## You should have also received the following leaflets:

- Radiotherapy- a general guide for patients and carers
- Planning your radiotherapy treatment
- Radiotherapy treatment
- Skin Care during radiotherapy treatment
- Dietary Advice during radiotherapy treatment

## What are the benefits of this treatment?

The radiotherapy is given to try to shrink the cancer and try to control symptoms you may have. Radiotherapy has damaging effects on any cancer cells. It will also cause some damage to surrounding healthy tissues resulting in some side effects.

## Are there any alternatives to this treatment?

The Oncologist may have advised you about other possible treatments before referring you for radiotherapy. They will be happy to discuss any concerns you may still have.

## What will happen if you do not have this treatment?

If you choose not to have this treatment, the cancer may continue to grow. Symptoms may develop and worsen. Some cancers may advance.

## Side effects- early reactions

### **Fatigue**

As radiotherapy can damage normal tissues close to or in the treated area, your body will use a great deal of energy to repair these damaged cells. This means that tiredness is a very common side effect of radiotherapy. If you feel fit enough, gentle exercise can help. Do not force yourself to do things you do not have the energy to do.

### **Inflammation of the oesophagus**

The tissue in your gullet will be irritated by the treatment and may become swollen. You may feel some discomfort, particularly when swallowing. It may feel like you have a lump in your throat. Your oncologist can prescribe some medicines to help with this. You may find you need to eat a softer diet. You should also drink plenty of fluids and avoid crunchy, hot, pickled or spicy foods. It is best not to drink alcohol, especially spirits, which may irritate your gullet even more.

### **Cough/Breathlessness**

You may find you develop a cough or become slightly breathless. If you have these symptoms already, you may find they become a little worse. You may cough up sputum (spit), which may contain a little blood.

### **Nausea/ Lack of appetite**

The treatment may cause you to feel sick. You may find your food tastes different or you do not feel like eating and drinking. If you wish to see a dietician, please inform the radiographers.

### **Sore, red skin (erythema)**

Radiotherapy can make the skin in the treated area become itchy, red, and sore. You can minimise this by following the advice of the radiographers (and our skin care leaflet).

## Side effects- late reactions

Radiotherapy may cause scarring (fibrosis) in the lungs close to treatment area. This may lead to a slight increase in breathlessness, but symptoms should be mild if the most of your lungs are working well. Please see your GP if this becomes a problem as breathing exercises and medication can help.

The oesophagus can become narrow making it difficult to swallow food. A minor procedure to stretch the gullet may be needed.

In rare cases, radiotherapy may cause some thinning in the ribs, which could result in a fracture.

In extremely rare cases, radiotherapy can lead to spinal cord damage but every effort is made to carefully plan your treatment to avoid this problem.

**Always** make sure you let the radiographers know if you get any side effects. We need you to tell us exactly how you feel not only with regard to side effects, but also your general wellbeing. We are here to help.

## Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

Radiotherapy Reception/Transport queries (01772) 522900

Radiotherapy Appointment queries (01772) 522931

## Sources of further information

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

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

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

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

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

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

**Urdu:**

دو سر ی زبانوں او ر بڑی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے لیے مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو ییچھیہا جس یبہ ابی دست ہو یسکت ہے برا ئے مہر یبان پو ے یچہ ہی۔ معلومات

**Arabic:**

مطبوعة بأحرف كبيرة و بلغات إذا كنت تريد مساعدة في فهم هذه المعلومات يرجى أن تطلب أخرى يمكن تو فسير هذه المعلومات

**Department:** Radiotherapy

**Division:** Surgery

**Production date:** October 2010

**Review date:** May 2023

**CA115 V3**