



Radiotherapy to the chest

This information is written for patients and aims to answer some of the questions you might have about radiotherapy to your chest.

Your hospital doctor (oncologist) has decided to treat your chest with radiotherapy. This will be given in a single treatment, a number of treatments per week or daily for a few weeks.

You could be seen by male and/or female radiographers when you have your radiotherapy planning and treatment.

Treatment

Your first visit will be for the planning of your treatment. At this visit you will be told when your treatment will start, how many treatments you will be having and on which days.

The aim of the treatment is to shrink your tumour to help your breathing or to ease a cough or pain and to make you feel better.

There are always some side effects from having radiotherapy. These usually go away quickly, but we are all different and we all respond and recover at different rates.

When your treatment is planned, pen marks will be made on your skin. These will fade but don't worry about this. The radiographers will ask to make at least three permanent small marks (tattoos) which will never fade.

What side effects am I likely to have?

Your skin in the treated area, both on the front and back of your body, may become slightly red. This is nothing to worry about and will settle a couple of weeks after your treatment has finished.

Wash the treated area gently and pat dry, but do not rub. You can wash with your usual soap and warm (but not hot) water.

You may apply a mild non-perfumed moisturiser to the treated areas to ease any discomfort you may have.

You may feel sick, depending on where you are being treated. Your oncologist will be able to prescribe some medication for you.

Men may lose their chest hair in the treated area. Any hair regrowth will depend on the dose of radiotherapy you will be given.

You may also feel tired from the treatment.

Your oncologist will discuss these side-effects with you.

Will I have any longer-term side effects?

About a week after the end of treatment, you may find that you cough more and you may have some discomfort when swallowing food.

There are medicines the doctor may give to help relieve your discomfort. These problems will usually settle down within a few weeks.

It is best to avoid crispy foods such as chips, crisps and toast, as well as spicy foods and spirits. Try to eat softer foods such as fish, mince, scrambled eggs and soup. Do not have food and drinks that are very hot or very cold.

Sometimes, some people feel they are more short of breath.

Will I have any check-ups after my treatment?

After this treatment, you will need regular check-ups. The oncologist may see you in the outpatient department at your nearest District General Hospital, or you may be referred back to your family doctor (GP), chest physician or specialist nurse, who will have been given details of your treatment.

What if I have any other questions or worries?

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (based at Mount Vernon Hospital) can offer support and information.

People who have had cancer may say that during their illness they experienced a range of emotions. Some of these emotions are expected and others are unexpected. Many people find this to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time, both as individuals and within relationships. Some patients find it harder to make decisions or to face up to things. They may feel overwhelmed and unable to focus on positive aspects within their lives.

If you have difficulty making sense of your feelings, or can relate to any of these experiences, you may find talking the situation through with a trained counsellor/psychologist helpful.

Counselling aims to provide individuals and their families with a chance to understand these new experiences in a way that can help them manage the situation better.

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre can provide counselling and a range of other services including relaxation sessions and complementary therapies.

Leaflets which you may find helpful include the following:

- Chewing & swallowing problems
- Controlling cancer pain
- Living with tiredness (fatigue)
- Managing taste changes

You can obtain copies of these factsheets from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

Consent

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

Identification

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet and your hospital name band each time you attend. You must wear your name band at all times whilst in hospital.

If you normally pay for NHS prescriptions

People undergoing treatment for cancer do not have to pay NHS prescription charges if they have a valid medical exemption certificate.

To get an exemption certificate, ask your GP for an application form.

Pregnancy/fathering a child

Female patients must not be pregnant or become pregnant and male patients must not father a child during a course of radiotherapy or for some months afterwards. **Please discuss this with your cancer specialist.**

If you think there is a chance, however small, of you or your partner being pregnant during treatment, it is extremely important that you discuss this with your oncologist, radiographer or nurse as soon as possible.

Female patients will be asked to confirm their pregnancy status prior to radiotherapy. This applies to all women between the ages of 12-55 years. This is a legal requirement.

Other help and support

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time.

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, including the supportive services offered at the LJMC, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you and include healthcare professionals and trained volunteers. The centre provides a relaxed setting in which to talk and ask questions.

The LJMC is situated between the main Cancer Centre building and Gate 3 (White Hill).

 **Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre**
... supporting people affected by cancer...

Services offered at the LJMC include:

- ① Drop-in centre
- ① Telephone helpline
- ① Benefits advice*
- ① Complementary therapies*
- ① Relaxation classes
- ① Counselling*
- ① Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- ① The Way Ahead headwear workshops
- ① Self-help courses

* These services are only available to NHS patients under the care of an oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Mon-Fri: **9.30am-1.00pm & 2.00-4.30pm**

Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**

Website: **www.ljmc.org**

Contacts

Radiotherapy clinic nurses:020 3826 2186

Radiotherapy clinic radiographers:020 3826 2612