

a patient's guide



East and North Hertfordshire
NHS Trust

Radium-223 therapy

Patient Information Series PI 79



Mount Vernon
Cancer Centre

Contacts

Who can I contact about this treatment?

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment please feel free to contact us.

Nuclear Medicine Department:

Mon - Fri: 8.30am – 4.30pm 020 3826 2263

24 hour Acute Oncology Service

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre: 07825 028855

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.

Radium-223 therapy

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Introduction

This booklet is written for patients who are being offered radium therapy to help reduce their pain and slow the spread of cancer in their bones. It aims to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about this treatment.

If anything in this leaflet is unclear, please call the Nuclear Medicine Department (see contact number on page 2) and the staff will be pleased to help you.

What is radium-223 therapy?

Radium is absorbed by rapidly-growing bone cells, just like calcium. Radium-223 therapy has been developed to attack the secondary cancer cells (metastases) which are growing in your bones. It is given by an injection into one of the veins in your arm, and cancer cells in your bones will then absorb the radium-223.

Radium-223 is mildly radioactive. This means that it releases radiation into the parts of your bones where the cancer is growing. As it is only mildly radioactive, it will only affect a small distance into the bone where the radium has been absorbed, which means there is normally no radiation outside your body. It also means that there are fewer side-effects. However your urine and faeces will be radioactive for the first week.

This means we are able to deliver 'radiotherapy' to all the sites in your bones damaged by secondary cancer. This is a very effective way of treating the cancer cells there.

Where is the treatment given?

The treatment is given in the Nuclear Medicine Department at Mount Vernon Hospital. The hospital entrance that is closest to this department is Gate 1.

The easiest route is through the main entrance of the hospital, turn left and with your back to the main staircase turn left again (staying on the ground floor). Walk to the end of the corridor where you will see the signs to the Nuclear Medicine Department on the left.

Or you can use the door into the corridor to the left of the main entrance. This gives better access for disabled people. Through this doorway, turn left and follow the signs as before to the Nuclear Medicine Department.

Will I have to sign a consent form?

Yes. As with all medical procedures you will be asked to sign a consent form, which shows you agree to have this treatment. If you are concerned or unclear about any aspects of this treatment, please ask the team treating you. They will answer your questions before you sign the consent form (see contact number on page 2).

How is this treatment given?

You will have your treatment as an outpatient. Your course of treatment will be six injections of radium: one injection every four weeks. The radium injection is into one of the veins in your arm.

A cannula (small tube) will be inserted into a vein and blood samples taken. The blood samples need to be checked by the doctor, before the injection can be given. This will allow the doctor to determine if it is safe to give you the next radium injection. The radium is then injected through this cannula.

You will also be weighed. This is to ensure you receive the correct dose for your body weight. You should expect to be in the hospital for most of the day. However most patients are finished by 2pm.

How should I prepare for this treatment?

You will need to have a blood test two to three weeks prior to your first treatment, so that the radium can be ordered. It is important that you attend for the blood test on the date given to you so that your radium can be ordered in time for your treatment appointment.

We advise you to avoid taking calcium supplements for seven days before the radium therapy. You can re-start these two days after the radium therapy. There is usually no need to prepare or make any other changes to your diet before having radium therapy, unless your doctor has advised you. Please feel free to ask your doctor or the team treating you, if any of this information is unclear.

If you are having any problems with bladder or bowel incontinence (which is when you have little or no control over passing urine or faeces, or if you leak or dribble urine or faeces) you must tell the doctor about this before you come for the radium therapy. Advice will be given to you by the doctor or the team in the nuclear medicine department.

Try to increase your fluids (water) for the first few days following your treatments.

Are there any side-effects from this treatment?

Many patients will not have any side-effects.

The most frequently seen side-effects are diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting.

There may be a slight fall in the number of cells in your blood, but this is unlikely to cause any effects which you will notice. You will have blood tests before starting radium therapy and before each radium injection to check this.

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, you should ask your doctor who will be pleased to explain.

If you notice any of the following symptoms you should contact your doctor straight away:

- any unusual bruising
- more bleeding than usual after minor injury
- fever
- symptoms of pain, swelling or numbness of the jaw, or loosening of a tooth

When will I know if it has worked?

You may not notice any changes. If you are having pain from the cancer in your bones, the pain may slowly improve.

As radium targets the cancer in your bone your PSA levels may stop rising or even fall. But this may take several months to happen.

Will I be radioactive after the treatment?

For a short time after the treatment your body fluids will be slightly radioactive. The risks to you from the radioactivity are very small compared with the benefit you get from the treatment.

What about my family and other contacts?

At home you will need to take some precautions, because the radioactivity in your body fluids may be hazardous to other people.

As your body fluids will be slightly radioactive, it is important to take the following precautions for a week after each radium treatment:

- if a normal toilet is available it should be used rather than a urinal
- wipe away any spilled urine or faeces with a tissue and flush it away
- the toilet should be flushed twice with the lid down
- ensure that you always wash your hands after going to the toilet
- always wash any linens or clothes which become stained with body fluids straight away. Wash these items separately from other items and rinse them well. You should wash your hands well afterwards (even if you have worn gloves)
- if you should cut yourself, wash away any spilled blood
- any rubbish should be double bagged and placed in your normal household rubbish, NOT clinical waste
- you should not have sexual intercourse for a week

If you are unclear about any of these instructions please call for advice (see contact number on page 2).

Information for men: fertility

This treatment may damage the sperm even though it won't prevent its production. This damage could cause genetic problems to an unborn child. For this reason we recommend that a man does not father a child during radium treatment and for six months afterwards.

Please discuss this topic with your hospital doctor or one of the team treating you, so that you are quite clear what this actually means in your case.

Can I change my appointment once it is made?

Yes, you can change your appointment. However, to get the most benefit from the radium therapy it is important for you to keep your appointments and have your injections on time.

The radium is expensive and has to be ordered specially for each patient when the appointment is booked. The hospital will still have to pay for it if there is a late cancellation.

We would be grateful if any unavoidable appointment cancellation or rearrangement could be made at least **one week** before the appointment is due. This is so that the order for your radium can be changed. We will understand if there are situations such as illness which are beyond your control.

Please call if you **cannot** attend your appointment (contact number on page 2).

Car parking at the hospital

A Pay & Display parking scheme operates 24 hours a day. Cancer patients have a £1 concessionary parking rate but must register for this.

Registration forms are on the back of appointment letters or are available at the Cancer Centre Reception desk.

On your first visit, take your registration form to one of the following offices (Mon - Fri), where you will be given a yellow Concessionary Parking Pass:

- **Facilities Office:** 8am - 4pm
- **Car Parking Office:** 8am - 1pm and 2pm - 4pm
- **Post Room:** 8.30am - 12pm and 1pm - 4pm

Get a Concession/Blue Badge ticket for £1 at the Pay and Display machine and display this and your yellow pass on the car dashboard. Your yellow pass can be used in any car.

Blue badge holders do not need to register. Pay £1 at the Pay & Display machine. Please display your ticket and blue badge on your dashboard.

Getting help with paying for transport

If you are on a low income, you may be eligible for help with paying for the cost of transport to and from the hospital. This includes bus and train fares and car mileage but not taxi costs.

For further information about eligibility, please speak to Patient Affairs (020 3826 2343) or visit www.nhs.uk and search for 'Travel costs'.

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 have any questions or concerns about cancer and your treatment, are struggling to cope or need some support, please visit the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC). Please feel free to drop in before, during or after any of your visits to the Cancer Centre.

The team at the LJMC works as part of the overall team caring for you to provide help, support and information in a relaxed setting to help you better cope with cancer and its treatment. Your family and friends are also welcome to visit the centre or call the Helpline.

A range of support services are available at the centre. These include complementary therapy, relaxation sessions, counselling and financial advice. Please ask for more details.

You do not need an appointment to visit the LJMC which is located next to the Chemotherapy Suite by Gate 3. If you are unable to get to the LJMC, you can call the Helpline on 020 3826 2555.

Please see the back page of this leaflet for more information.

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre is committed to ensuring that patients receive the best quality of care regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

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 every time you attend.

Pregnancy/fathering a child

Patients must not be pregnant or become pregnant, or father a child, during a course of treatment or for some months afterwards. **Please discuss this with your cancer specialist.**

If you are of child bearing capacity we ask that you inform a member of staff. It is our duty of care to enquire whether individuals may be pregnant or breastfeeding. This information will be kept in strict confidence.

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.

This leaflet has been produced by staff in the Nuclear Medicine Department, together with professionals, patients and carers from Mount Vernon Cancer Centre and the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre who have expertise and experience in the topics covered by this publication.

All our publications are reviewed and updated regularly. Details of the references used to write this information are available from the Information Team at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

**Questions or concerns about
cancer and treatment?
Struggling to cope?
Need some support? Need to talk?**

Drop in to the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre
or call the support & information helpline

We will listen to your concerns, answer your questions
and guide you to further information
and services to help you

cancer treatment	practical support
side effects of treatment	headwear workshops
day-to-day living with cancer	exercise
benefits advice	diet and nutrition
counselling	health and wellbeing
someone to talk to	talking to family and friends
emotional support	Look Good Feel Better
complementary therapy	self-help courses
relaxation services	life after cancer

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre is situated between the
Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)

Opening hours: Monday–Friday 9.30am–4.30pm

020 3826 2555

www.ljmc.org

Supporting people affected by cancer
from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond