



Kent Oncology Centre
**Electron Beam Radiotherapy
Treatment and Planning**

Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand your electron beam radiotherapy planning and treatment. Please feel free to discuss any concerns you may have with the treatment staff, or contact the Macmillan team on the numbers given below:



Maidstone Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists
Appointment enquiries

 01622 225094
 01622 225080

Kent & Canterbury Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists
Appointment enquiries

 01227 766877
ext 722 2711
 01227 783010

What is electron beam radiotherapy?

Electron beam radiotherapy is treatment using a radiation beam of particles called electrons. This radiation is strong enough to kill cancer cells but does not penetrate more than a few centimetres beyond the surface of the skin. It is given using equipment similar to a large x-ray machine. It is very useful for treating skin cancers and tumours near to the skin's surface avoiding any deeper delicate structures.

The treatment is given to you as an outpatient in the radiotherapy department. Several doses of treatment are necessary and these are given over a period of one or more weeks. Your consultant will discuss your individual treatment plan with you.

Each treatment is called a 'fraction'. Giving the treatment in fractions ensures that normal cells are damaged less than cancer cells. External electron beam radiotherapy does not make you radioactive so it is safe for you to be with people, including children, after each treatment.

Giving your consent

Before you have radiotherapy your consultant will explain the aims of the treatment to you. You will be asked to sign a form saying that you give your permission (consent) for the hospital staff to give you the treatment; no medical treatment can be given without your consent. Before you are asked to sign the form you should have been given full information about:

- the type and extent of the treatment you are advised to have
- the advantages and disadvantages of the treatment
- any other treatments that may be available
- any significant risks or side effects of the treatment

If there is anything you don't understand let the staff know straight away so that they can explain.

It can be helpful to have a friend or relative with you when the treatment is explained, to help you remember the discussion more fully. You may also find it useful to write down a list of questions before you attend any appointments. You do not have to make a decision when the treatment is first explained, you can always ask for more time to think it through.

You are free to choose **not** to have the treatment, and the staff can explain what may happen as a result of that.

Pregnant?

Please tell the medical staff if you might be pregnant; radiotherapy can harm the developing baby.

Planning your treatment

Careful planning ensures that the treatment is as effective as possible and that the radiotherapy rays are aimed precisely at the cancer, causing the least possible damage to the surrounding healthy tissues.

Positioning

During the treatment planning session you will be lying on a fairly hard couch, identical to the one that you will lie on during treatment. The radiographers will make you as comfortable as possible. The oncologist will decide the area to be treated and draw some ink marks on your skin. We need you to lie very still for a few minutes so that photographs and accurate measurements can be taken and your exact position recorded. The radiographers can then make sure that you are lying in the correct position each time you have treatment.

Ink marks can be removed before you go home. Occasionally permanent skin marks, the size of a pinpoint, may be necessary but this will be discussed with you beforehand. Some patients' treatment may need to be discussed with other staff e.g. physicists or technicians.

Treatment masks

Although not always required you may need to have a special mask made, designed to guide the treatment very accurately. A personal mask is made by taking an impression of the treatment area with a soft modeling compound. The procedure is painless and usually takes about half an hour. If you have been told you will need a mask please do not wear any hair products, e.g. hairspray, gel or wax on the day of planning; these can make hair stick to the mask during moulding.

The mask will be made and ready to wear before your next visit. It will fit snugly but you will be able to breathe normally and you will only need to wear it for a short while on each visit. If the treatment is near your eye the mask may cover one or both to protect them during treatment.

Wax

Sometimes wax or a similar material may be placed on the treatment area to adjust the depth of tissue being treated.

Additional planning

Further adjustments may be made before or during your treatment which may require extra visits to the department.

Having your treatment

Before your first treatment the radiographers will explain to you what you will see and hear. It's quite normal to feel anxious about having your treatment, but as you get to know the staff and understand what is going on it should become easier. Don't be afraid to talk about any fears or worries to the staff; they are there to help you, and the more you understand about your treatment the more relaxed you will be. Radiotherapy is painless and each session takes a few minutes.

Your positioning is very important, so the radiographers may take a little while to get you ready (they may call this 'setting up') and to adjust the height and position of the table. The radiographer will move the treatment machine close to you.

As soon as you are positioned correctly the staff will need to leave the room to prevent them from being exposed to any unnecessary radiation.

During treatment you will be alone for a few minutes but there will be a radiographer watching you during this time on a monitor camera. To protect your privacy, nobody else will be able to see you. If you have any problems you can raise your hand to attract the radiographer's attention and they will come in to help you.

Short term side effects

You will be monitored throughout your treatment by the radiotherapy team. Please let them know if you experience any of the following problems:

Skin changes

You may notice some redness (like sunburn), increased pigmentation (darkening), tenderness or itching of the skin in the treatment area. Your skin may peel or flake as treatment continues and this may result in a sore and weepy skin reaction.

Your skin reaction can be affected by the dose and type of treatment that your consultant has prescribed. It can also be dependent on your type of skin, your shape, any existing conditions such as diabetes and especially if you smoke.

Advice can be provided to help you stop smoking.

Tips for helping your skin include:

- Wash the skin gently using soap or aqueous cream and gently pat dry
 - To reduce irritation to the treatment area you may use a moisturiser sparingly (your Macmillan radiographer can advise on this)
 - Continue to use normal deodorant unless this irritates the skin or the skin is broken
 - Wear loose fitting natural fibre clothing next to the skin
 - Avoid heating and cooling pads/ice
 - Avoid hair removal products
 - Avoid adhesive tape
 - Do not apply any chemicals like perm lotion, gel, hair spray, dyes to the treated skin during the treatment time
 - Ensure the skin is covered when out in the sun; your skin may be more sensitive to the sun especially in your first year after treatment so it is advisable to apply a high factor sun screen
 - Men are advised not to shave if the treatment area is within the beard
 - Lesions (treatment areas) in the hair or hair line should be covered when hair washing, using a mild shampoo and warm water
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After finishing treatment you may be aware of your skin reaction becoming worse for up to another two weeks. Continue with the suggested skin care tips, returning gradually to your usual skin care regime when your skin has returned to normal.

For some people a scab may form over the treatment area. This may peel away and reform several times before leaving healed skin underneath and any redness in the treatment area will begin to fade. At first, this new skin will look pinker than the skin around it. This will gradually fade, and the treated area will come to look like the skin around it, though maybe slightly paler.

Hair loss

Radiotherapy to areas that produce hair, such as the head, can make the hair fall out in the treated area. Your hair may grow back within six to twelve months, depending on the dose of radiotherapy and the length of treatment you've had. However, for some people their hair loss is permanent. Your doctor can discuss with you whether your hair is likely to grow back once the treatment has ended.

Still smoking?

Smoking during treatment may reduce the success of your treatment. Please ask for help if this is a problem for you

Further information and advice can be obtained from:

Kent Oncology Macmillan Cancer Information Centre, Maidstone Hospital

Offers support and information to anyone who has concerns about cancer (patients, relatives, friends or carers).

☎ 01622 227064

Macmillan Cancer Support

Provide practical, medical and financial information

☎ 0808 808 0000 (Free phone)

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research

This charity provides information about cancer, treatment and clinical trials.

☎ 0808 800 4040

Website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Kent Oncology website: www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Counsellors in the following hospitals:

Kent and Canterbury

☎ 01227 864045

Maidstone

☎ 01622 224982

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother ☎ 01843 225544 ext 64202

William Harvey

☎ 01233 633331 ext 88790

Patient Experience Teams for East Kent patients:

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

Desk at the outpatient's entrance of the hospital

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital

Office at the main entrance of the hospital (Ramsgate Road)

William Harvey Hospital

Desk at the main entrance of the hospital

☎ 01227 783145 or 01227 864314

E mail: ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Macmillan Cancer Support.

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

Telephone: ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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