

Kent Oncology Centre
**Radiotherapy Side Effects and
Management: Anal Cancer**
Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the side effects that may occur when having external radiotherapy to the anus. It also explains the best management of these side effects. If you would like to speak to one of the radiotherapy team please feel free to contact them on the numbers given below:

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialist ☎ 01622 225094
☎ 07825 978632

Maidstone Hospital
Appointment enquiries ☎ 01622 225080

Kent & Canterbury Hospital
Appointment enquiries ☎ 01227 783010

You will be given a copy of our leaflet 'External Beam Radiotherapy' which we advise you to read alongside this leaflet; it provides general information about radiotherapy and useful contact numbers. If you have not been given a copy please ask. Our leaflets are also available on the Kent Oncology Centre website: www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Side effects from radiotherapy to the anus

Some side effects may occur, usually towards the end of the course of treatment and also during the first few weeks after treatment has finished. These side effects can be upsetting and may require you to make some adjustments to your normal life, but most are temporary and will gradually disappear after a few weeks. Treatments given over several weeks give more side effects than a short course of treatment.

Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive. It is safe for you to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.

Pregnant?

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

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:

Tiredness

Radiotherapy can make you tired so you may need more rest than usual, especially if you have to travel a long way for treatment every day. It is good to try to get some exercise each day, however gentle.

Loss of appetite and sickness

Some people lose their appetite as an effect of radiotherapy. It is often better to try to eat little and often. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids e.g. water, squash, fruit juice, milk, soups and decaffeinated drinks.

If you struggle to eat much, it is a good idea to supplement your meals with nutritious high-calorie drinks. These are available on prescription or can be bought from chemists. The radiographers can arrange for you to see a dietitian who will advise you on your diet.

Occasionally radiotherapy can make you feel sick (nauseous). This can often be helped by drinking more fluids but medication can be prescribed if necessary.

Bowel effects

Radiotherapy can cause bowel movements to become looser, more frequent and more urgent.

You may get diarrhoea, particularly if you are also having chemotherapy, and may need medication to control it. Drinking plenty of fluids and altering your diet may help. However, it is important for the stools to remain soft so that it is less painful when your bowels are opened. The bowels usually settle about two to three weeks after radiotherapy treatment ends

Bladder irritation

Radiotherapy to the anus often irritates the bladder. You may feel as if you have cystitis (a bladder infection) and want to pass urine all the time, but when you go you pass very little. You may feel a burning pain when you pass urine. Try to drink plenty of fluids. Bladder irritation will settle down after treatment is completed, but tell your doctor if it continues in case you have an infection that needs treating with antibiotics.

Skin changes

The skin around the anus is very sensitive. It will become red and sore, and may blister during your treatment requiring dressings. You may also become very sore in the groin and

- for women, around the vagina/vulva area,
- for men, on the penis and scrotum.

You will be prescribed painkillers to help until your skin heals.

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.

Tips for helping your skin include:

- Wash the skin gently using soap or aqueous cream and gently pat dry.
- Use aqueous cream on toilet tissue when wiping around the anus.
- To reduce irritation to the treatment area you may use a moisturiser sparingly. Your Macmillan radiographer and doctor will be monitoring your skin throughout treatment and can advise on this.
- Wear loose fitting natural fibre clothing next to the skin, removing underwear whenever practicable.
- Avoid heating and cooling pads/ice.
- Avoid hair removal products.
- Avoid adhesive tape.

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.

Hair loss

This only occurs in the area being treated.

Still smoking?

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

Long term side effects

These may include:

- Frequent bowel movements
- Bladder shrinkage causing you to pass urine more often
- Small amounts of blood in your urine and stools
- Weak muscles in the anus, leading to incontinence
- Chronic diarrhoea and weight loss

For women:

- Dryness and shrinkage of your vagina, making sex uncomfortable. This may be kept to a minimum by using vaginal dilators; if appropriate you will be given the leaflet 'Advice about using dilators after radiotherapy'.
- Early menopause

For men:

- Difficulty getting an erection

For both men and women:

- Loss of fertility; this will be permanent

If you have concerns about any continuing side effects, please inform your consultant.

Please use this space to write any notes or questions you may have.

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 (Freephone)

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research

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

☎ 0808 800 4040

Website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Patient Experience Teams (PALS) 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

Email: ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Cancer Research UK.

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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