

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

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the side effects that may occur when having external radiotherapy to the bladder. 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 Urology Radiographers  07703 971991

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists  01622 225094

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 can also be found on the **Kent Oncology Centre website**: www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Side effects of external radiotherapy to the bladder

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. Treatments given over several weeks give more side effects than a short course of treatment.

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. However, some side effects may continue for, and some may only become apparent after, months or years following treatment. It is important to discuss these with your consultant as help may be available. Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive; it is safe 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

You may find that you become more tired as your treatment goes on. This is very common with radiotherapy. It is partly the travelling back and forth to hospital, and partly an effect of the treatment itself. You may need to rest more than usual. 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 and soups.

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 the chemists. The radiographers can arrange for you to see a dietitian who can 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 needed.

Bowel effects

Radiotherapy to the bladder quite commonly affects the bowel as it causes irritation and inflammation of the bowel. Bowel movements become looser, more frequent and more urgent. Drinking plenty of fluids and altering your diet may help. Occasionally medication may be required if you have diarrhoea. This usually settles down about two to three weeks after your radiotherapy treatment ends.

Inflammation of the back passage (proctitis)

Proctitis can cause a feeling of wanting to strain whether or not you actually need to pass a bowel movement, and bleeding from your back passage (rectum). Bleeding is usually slight. You may also have a slimy mucous discharge from your rectum.

Bladder irritation

Radiotherapy 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 and you may feel a burning pain. Please tell the radiotherapy team if you experience this and try to drink plenty of fluids.

The irritation should settle down a few weeks after treatment is completed, but tell your GP if it continues, in case you have an infection that needs treating with antibiotics. If you are unable to pass any urine you need to go to your nearest Emergency Care Centre or A&E.

Skin changes

Skin reactions in the treatment area should be very mild. There could be slight redness and itching.

Tips for helping your skin include:

- Wash the skin gently using soap or aqueous cream and gently pat dry.
- Wear loose fitting natural fibre clothing next to the skin.
- Avoid heating and cooling pads/ice.
- Avoid hair removal products.
- Avoid adhesive tape.

After finishing treatment you may be aware of a skin reaction developing 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 will reduce the success of your treatment. Please ask for help if this is a problem for you.

Long term side effects

For a small number of people side effects may continue for, or may only become apparent, months or years after radiotherapy. They may be permanent and can include:

- Bladder shrinkage causing you to pass urine more often
 - Frequent bowel movements and diarrhoea which may require an alteration to your diet, medication, or very rarely, a referral to a specialist.
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- Small amounts of blood in your urine and stools
 - Difficulty getting an erection. If this is a problem your Macmillan radiographer can arrange for you to attend a Wellman Clinic.
 - 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.**
 - Loss of fertility
 - Early menopause

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 (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

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

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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