



Kent Oncology Centre  
**Side Effects and Management for  
Radiotherapy to the Abdomen**  
Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the side effects that may occur when having external radiotherapy to the abdomen. 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:



**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

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](http://www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk)

---

---

## Side effects from external radiotherapy to the abdomen

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 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, tea, coffee, 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 chemists. The radiographers can arrange for you to see a dietitian who can help advise you on your diet.

Radiotherapy to the abdomen can make you feel sick (nauseous). This can often be helped by drinking more fluids but medication can be prescribed if needed.

### **Bowel effects**

Sometimes radiotherapy can cause bowel movements to become looser and more frequent. This is because the bowel can become irritated and inflamed, so the rectum can't hold stools (faeces) as well as usual.

Please let the radiotherapy team know if this becomes a problem for you as medication can be provided if required. You may be given further advice on altering your diet. This usually settles down about two to three weeks after radiotherapy treatment ends.

### **Skin changes**

Skin changes in the treatment area should be mild with slight redness and itching. However, 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.
  - To reduce irritation to the treatment area you may use a moisturiser sparingly. The radiographers can advise on this.
  - Wear loose fitting natural fibre clothing next to the skin.
-

- 
- Avoid heating and cooling pads/ice.
  - Avoid hair removal products.
  - Avoid adhesive tape.
  - 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; it is advisable to apply a high factor sun screen.

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.

**Still smoking?**

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

---

---

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](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

**Cancer Research**

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

☎ 0808 800 4040

Website: [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://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](mailto:ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net)

**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](mailto: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](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

Issue date: November 2015  
Database reference: RWF-OPLF-PCS66

Review date: November 2018  
© MTW NHS Trust

Disclaimer: Printed copies of this document may not be the most recent version.  
The master copy is held on Q-Pulse Document Management System  
This copy – REV3.0

---