

Colorectal Radiotherapy

Your treatment appointments

You will need to arrive 30-40 minutes before your appointment time to complete your bladder preparation.

- A radiographer will collect you from the main oncology waiting area (A12) and explain the treatment to you and discuss possible side effects with you.
- You will then be shown to the changing room and asked to remove your shoes and bottom items of clothing, leaving your underwear on.
- The radiographers will take you into the treatment room and position you on the treatment couch. The room lights will be dimmed and a light and green laser lights will be shone on your skin to line up the treatment area with the machine.
- Once you are in the correct position, the radiographers leave the room but are watching you at all times.
- Treatment to the pelvis is given from two or more different angles or via an arc of treatment these are checked daily prior to treatment. When the machine is on it makes a buzzing sound, but the treatment is painless.
- X-ray images will be taken before treatment every day. The bed is then moved (if needed) from outside the room before the treatment begins.

Short term side effects

These side effects are temporary. They often occur from the second week of treatment, increase during the course and can take several weeks to settle after treatment has finished.

Often radiotherapy for Rectal Cancer is combined with chemotherapy. This can increase the short-term side-effects of radiotherapy

- Tiredness
- Pink or inflamed skin in the treatment area
- Loose bowels or diarrhoea
- Nausea
- Pubic hair loss
- Reduced wound healing of the perineum (skin around your bottom) or anastomosis (join in the bowel) following surgery.



Long term side effects

Side effects from radiotherapy can sometimes occur many months or years after treatment. These are much less common than side effects experienced during treatment but are usually permanent.

- Infertility – radiotherapy to the pelvis is likely to cause infertility.
- Damage to the bowel or ano-rectal sphincter muscle causing a change in bowel habit or faecal urgency or incontinence
- Vaginal dryness in women which can cause difficulty with intercourse
- Impotence in men. Radiotherapy for rectal cancer can affect the ability to gain and sustain an erection when combined with surgery.

Looking after yourself during and after your Radiotherapy

- ✓ **Do** continue washing/bathing as normal.
- ✓ **Do** be gentle with your skin, pat dry.
- ✓ **Do** avoid extremes of temperature such as heating and cooling pads.
- ✓ **Do** increase your fluid intake – ideally two litres of water a day, minimise alcohol consumption.
- ✓ **Do** feel free to discuss any worries with the radiographers.
- ✓ **Do** wear loose fitting cotton underwear.
- ✓ **Do** advise the radiographers of any changes to your bowel habits.
- ✓ **Do** read ‘Managing your side effects – Bowels’ leaflet.
- ✓ **Do** read our ‘Managing your Radiotherapy skin reaction’ leaflet

Smoking can make your skin reaction worse – if you need help to stop please ask for advice.

Radiotherapy department contact details

01225 824853 Monday-Friday 8am-3:30pm

Website: www.ruh.nhs.uk/patients/services/radiotherapy

Other useful phone numbers/websites

Bath RUH cancer information centre: (01225) 82 4049

Macmillan: www.macmillan.org.uk
08088 080000

Life after cancer PocketMedic® have produced some patient information videos, available at www.medic.video/swe15-cancer (Life after cancer)

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG

01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.