

Radiotherapy to bones

- **Skin reaction** – radiotherapy may cause your skin to become slightly red and itchy, like mild sunburn. The degree to which you notice this depends on how much treatment you have and the part of the body being treated, as some areas are more sensitive than others. To reduce this effect, wash your skin with a mild, unscented soap using water that is not too hot and pat dry gently. Don't apply heat to the area being treated such as a hot water bottle or heat pads.
- **Tiredness** – radiotherapy often makes people feel tired so try to get as much rest as you need, especially if you are travelling a long way for treatment each day. This will gradually improve in the weeks following your treatment, but may take some time.

General advice

If you have secondary cancer (metastases) in the bones of the spine (vertebrae) there is a risk of developing Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression. This is when the metastases press on the nerves in your spinal cord. It is very rare but may cause damage to the spinal cord if left untreated. The symptoms to watch for are:

- numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in your arms or legs
- difficulty in using your arms or legs
- problems controlling your bowels or bladder.

If you become aware of any of these symptoms, immediately contact your GP, your Macmillan Nurse or the Sunrise Centre on 01872 258340 (not 24 hours).

Data Protection

All personal images and photographs taken during the planning and delivery of radiotherapy will be used in accordance with this Trusts' policy on the protection and use of patient information.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690



The name of your consultant is:

.....

The radiographer who explained the treatment to you is:

.....

You can contact us on:

Tel: 01872 258340 – 9am to 5pm

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy treats cancer by using high energy X-rays. The aim of treatment for secondary cancer in the bone is to relieve any symptoms to make you more comfortable. Radiotherapy can be very effective at controlling bone pain. The treatment itself is totally painless.

Sometimes, if a bone is very weakened by the cancer, it may fracture even if you have not had a fall or accident. Radiotherapy may also be used to help this, either alone, or combined with surgery to strengthen the bone with a steel rod.

How often is radiotherapy given?

The radiotherapy may be given in a single visit or as a short course lasting one to two weeks. Your oncologist will decide how many treatments you will need after your planning scan.

Radiotherapy is usually given on the days from Monday to Friday with a break at the weekend, but occasionally it may be important to give the treatment at the weekend as well.

What is a planning scan?

Before you start radiotherapy it is essential that we carefully target the area needing treatment. The most effective way to do this is by means of a CT scan. The scan will be done in the oncology department and takes about 10 minutes.

At the end of the scan you will be asked if we may make some tiny permanent marks (tattoos) on your skin. These dots act as reference points and are used to ensure you are lying in the correct position and that the area needing radiotherapy is correctly treated.

What happens on my first day of treatment?

1. One of the radiographers will collect you from the waiting room and explain exactly how the treatment will be given.
2. You will then be taken into the treatment room and asked to lie on the couch in the same position in which you were scanned. You will be asked to remove any clothing which covers the treatment area.
3. The radiographers will position the couch in the correct position and then leave the room before switching the machine on. The radiographers can both see and hear you during the treatment, which lasts about 10 minutes.

An X-ray is taken before going ahead with each treatment to check you have been positioned correctly.

What side effects can I expect?

Radiotherapy is a local treatment and the side effects are related to the area you have had treated. A radiographer will talk to you before you have any treatment to discuss any side effects you may expect.

- **Nausea and vomiting** – nausea and/or vomiting are possible if the area you have had treated is close to your stomach, for example the middle of your back or ribs. This can be effectively controlled with anti-sickness drugs (called anti-emetics) and these will be given to you if thought necessary. Often you need to take these before each treatment.
- **Pain** – it may be several weeks after you have completed your radiotherapy before your pain improves significantly, although some people notice a benefit within a few days. During this time it is important to take adequate painkillers. Occasionally people find their pain increases temporarily when they start radiotherapy. If at any time your pain is not controlled let your doctor, the radiographers or your Macmillan nurse know so that your pain relief can be adjusted. There are a great number of extremely effective painkillers available.