

Completing your radiotherapy treatment

Information for patients

This leaflet answers common questions about what to expect over the next few weeks after completing your radiotherapy treatment. If you would like further information, or have any particularly worries, please do not hesitate to ask your radiotherapy review specialist nurse.

The radiotherapy you have received will continue to have an effect on you after you have finished treatment. The benefits of the treatment may take some time to become apparent and the time it takes varies from person to person.

Any side-effects you have been experiencing or have been advised to expect will continue for a week or two – they often reach a peak seven to ten days after your treatment finishes. This is normal and the reactions will gradually subside. Until then, please continue to follow the advice you have been given during your treatment.

Some patients will have a follow-up appointment with the radiotherapy review specialist nurse/radiographer.

Skin care

Please continue to follow the skin care instructions you have been given until any reaction or irritation subsides (lessens). This normally takes about four weeks. Any skin reaction will peak in the seven to ten days following the completion of your treatment.

If your skin is unbroken we advise you to:

- Continue using any moisturising wash that has been given to you by the department until it runs out.
- You can resume using talcum powder if you wish.
- Wait two to three weeks before using deodorant if your armpit was in the treated area.

If your skin is broken, becomes weepy or you are concerned about the reaction, please contact the radiotherapy review specialist nurse/radiographer for advice. You should stop using moisturiser on the broken skin.

For longer term skin care you can use a gentle moisturiser if your skin feels dry.

Sun exposure

We advise you to avoid exposing the treated area to the sun for eight weeks following treatment. We also recommend using a factor 30 sun-cream or above for at least one year after treatment – after this, you should continue to take extra care not to expose the treated area as it may remain more sensitive to the sun.

Swimming

Swimming is not recommended until all skin reactions have settled down.

Diet

If we have advised you to change your diet, keep to the modified diet for two weeks. You can then gradually return to your normal diet. If you have any concerns please contact the radiotherapy review specialist nurse/radiographer or dietitian.

Tiredness (fatigue)

Some people continue to feel tired after treatment. The length of time this takes to improve varies from patient to patient – for some it takes weeks and for others it can take months, but this will improve.

Allowing yourself time to recover and rest when you need to can help you cope with this. Gentle exercise, when you feel able to, may also help improve the fatigue, and we encourage you to start slowly to begin exercising.

Emotional support

Some people feel isolated and low in mood, particularly once contact with the hospital is reduced and you have time to reflect on your illness. You may feel that you have been left on your own to cope with the side-effects of the treatment. Please remember that the team caring for you are still available. Please call them.

If you would like to discuss how you feel, please contact the counsellors, the team caring for you, the radiotherapy review specialist nurse/radiographer or any of the support organisations listed in this leaflet. The counselling service is also open to partners, carers or family members.

When will I know the results of the treatment?

Because the treatment can cause inflammation in the affected area, it is normal to wait a few weeks after your treatment before having any scans, tests or appointments. We appreciate you want to know the results of the treatment as soon as possible, but they could be misleading if done too soon after treatment.

It may take up to three months before the results of the treatment are known. The team caring for you will tell you about your next appointment.

If you have questions or concerns about your radiotherapy treatment and its effects, please contact your radiotherapy review specialist nurse/radiographer who will be able to advise you appropriately.

If you are concerned about other aspects of your illness

Please contact your specialist nurse, your main consultant or your GP.

If you continue to feel unwell following treatment

If you are unwell, your symptoms persist or you notice new symptoms, please contact your GP.

Things to look out for include:

- unusual rashes or bleeding
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, constipation
- unexplained loss of appetite
- unexplained loss of weight
- unusual lumps or swellings
- a persistent cough or fever
- pain that does not go away with your normal pain killers
- weakness or tingling in your legs which is new
- loss of bladder or bowel control.

Your next appointment

Many of these side-effects will have subsided by the time you next see a doctor in the hospital in approximately four to eight weeks' time. Your next appointment should have been discussed with you by a member of our team. If you have not received your appointment within three weeks of finishing treatment please contact the radiotherapy department (reception) or your radiotherapy consultant's secretary.

Who to contact when:

Radiotherapy review specialist: For help, advice and support about your radiotherapy skin or other reactions.	020 7830 2919
Radiotherapy department (reception): For enquires about appointments	020 7830 2919
Radiotherapy and oncology counsellors: For counselling and emotional support at any time, both during and after your illness.	020 7472 6739
Oncology out-patient clinic at the Royal Free Hospital: For follow up enquiries at the Royal Free Hospital	020 7830 2084
Specialist nurse For problems directly associated with your cancer, please contact your specialist nurse.	
GP For all other queries and for previously mentioned symptoms, please contact your GP.	

Further information

Staff in the Macmillan cancer information and support centre can provide you with survivorship booklets and information about local support groups.

Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan cancer information and support centre at:

- Barnet Hospital: 020 8216 4142
- Chase Farm Hospital: 020 8375 2247
- Royal Free Hospital: 020 7794 0500 ext 31337
- Whittington Hospital: 020 7288 5305 or 07881 834433

Support line: 080 8808 0000

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

For more information about the cancer service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website at: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/cancer-services

More information

For more information about cancer services at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/cancer-services

Your feedback

This booklet was written by staff from the radiotherapy department. If you have any comments on this leaflet or for references for it, please call 020 7472 6739.

Alternatively, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in smaller print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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Radiotherapy service

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