

Radiotherapy for keloid scars

Information for patients

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information about radiotherapy as part of the treatment to remove your keloid scar and prevent it coming back, including details of the procedure and side effects that you may experience.

Although you may have heard about radiotherapy from other patients it is important to remember that their experience may not be the same as yours. If you have any questions please let us know. We are here to help and are happy to talk through any concerns.

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy treatment for keloid scars uses superficial, or low dose, x-rays to target the site of the scar.

The specialist team looking after you will help you to understand the treatment and answer any questions you may have. If you have any doubts or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a member of your healthcare team, however insignificant it may seem.

Pregnancy

If there is any possibility that you may be pregnant you will need to cancel your keloid surgery as radiotherapy cannot be given.

How many treatments will I need?

You will need two treatments; one the day after your surgery to remove the keloid scar and one a week later.

On the first day your treatment will be planned as described below and you will then have your radiotherapy treatment. Please allow two to three hours for this appointment. Your second visit will be much shorter and should only take 30 minutes to an hour.

Planning your radiotherapy treatment

On your first visit to the radiotherapy department the precise area to be treated will be confirmed. We will use a marker pen to clearly identify the area – we will usually remove these marks. With your permission, we will also take photographs of the area.

We will also take an outline of the area being treated as we may need to make a small template to protect the tissue we do not wish to treat around your scar. This involves tracing the area the doctor decides to treat around your scar and making a template out of a piece of lead.

The radiographers will then work out the length of time your treatment will take based on the dose of treatment your doctor prescribes. Once this has been double checked, you will be ready to have your treatment.

Treatment

Treatment is given using a superficial x-ray machine, sometimes called the skin unit or superficial unit.

Most of the time in the room is spent by the staff making sure you are in the right position. You will be asked to lie down on the couch as comfortably as possible. The template will be positioned on your skin and the treatment machine will be carefully positioned over it, to gently touch it. The radiographers will then leave the room and switch on the machine. You will not feel anything and the treatment is painless. The actual treatment only takes a few minutes during which you will be left in the room alone, but you can be seen and heard at all times.

Appointment details

A member of the radiotherapy team will contact you with the date and time of your appointment once we know the date of your surgery.

It is also helpful to contact us when you are given the date of surgery by the plastic surgeons so we can confirm the date and time of your radiotherapy treatment.

Fares to the hospital may be claimed for those on low income and benefits; please ask a member of staff on reception for details.

Where do I go for treatment?

The skin unit is located in the radiotherapy department. The department is located on the ground floor of the Royal Free Hospital. It can be accessed via a separate entrance to the side of the main hospital entrance on Pond Street. You can also follow signs to the heart attack centre.

Skin care

Your skin may be sore after treatment. This will gradually get better over the next six weeks following treatment.

Advice on skin care and any dressings will be given to you following your surgery by the plastic surgery team. It is better to keep the treated area out of strong winds and sunshine as these can irritate the skin and make the reaction worse. You should also try to avoid clothes that will rub against the treated area.

In the longer term, your skin may become discoloured (pigmented) over the treated, ie become lighter or darker than before.

Follow-up

Your plastic surgery team will arrange for any stitches in your scar to be removed. If there is any sign of infection, such as discharge from the wound, or you have any other concerns about your scar, please contact the plastic surgery team or your GP.

You will be seen for a follow-up appointment by a member of the plastic surgery team – they will send you these appointment details.

Our contact numbers

- Radiotherapy review specialist: 020 7830 2919
- Radiotherapy department reception: 020 7830 2919
- Radiotherapy information service: 020 7472 6739
- Radiotherapy and oncology counsellors: 020 7472 6739

This booklet was written by staff from the radiotherapy department. If you have any comments on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please call 020 7472 6739 and leave a message for the information officer.

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

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