

Information for patients
having radiotherapy
treatment to the
chest (lung)



CANCER PARTNERS UK



This leaflet explains how to prepare for your radiotherapy treatment. It also gives information on possible side effects and how they can be minimised.

Preparation for treatment

Throughout treatment it is important to eat and drink normally. However the following should be taken into account:

- Avoid hot spicy and crunchy foods as they can cause discomfort when swallowing
- Drink plenty of fluids, at least 1.5 to 2 litres throughout the day is recommended. Fluids include water, fruit juice, tea, coffee, herbal drinks and soup

Side effects

There are a number of possible side effects to your radiotherapy treatment. You will not necessarily experience all of them, everyone is different.

Most side effects to radiotherapy are short-term. They may continue for some weeks after treatment has ended, but

should gradually disappear over time. They are also not systemic, which means they only occur in the area we are treating.

Your radiographers are here to help you, so please let them know if you have any concerns. They will monitor your side effects during treatment and you will be able to contact them if you need to after your treatment is complete.

Your skin

During your course of radiotherapy, you may develop a skin reaction in the area being treated, although this is unusual for lung and chest patients. Symptoms are similar to those of mild sunburn, with skin becoming a little red, and sometimes sore, dry and itchy. We can't tell who will develop a reaction, or how sore it might be, as everyone is different. However, it's important to follow our advice on how to care for your skin during treatment.

Please tell your radiographer straight away about any problems. They will monitor your skin very closely during treatment and can provide advice on the use of creams and ointments to help with any reactions you experience. Please

tell them if you have an existing skin condition, as they may need to give you special advice.

How to take care of your skin

As the skin in the area receiving radiotherapy will be sensitive during and after your treatment, please be gentle with the area and treat it with care and attention.

We recommend that you start following the instructions from the first day of treatment and up to six weeks afterwards, as it may take this long for any skin reactions to settle down. Remember these instructions are only relevant to the area being treated with radiotherapy. If you are unsure exactly which area will be affected, please ask your radiographer for advice.

[Please follow these simple instructions to help take care of your skin and keep reactions to a minimum:](#)

Washing

Use warm or tepid water while showering or bathing, avoiding any extremes of temperature, and use a mild, unperfumed soap such as Simple, Dove or baby soap. Aqueous cream

can also be used for washing, but please check any other products with your radiographers before using them. Try not to soak the treatment area in the bath for a long time, and avoid using a washcloth or sponge on the area.

Be gentle with the area when drying. Use a soft towel to pat the skin dry, being careful not to rub and taking particular care with folds of skin. It is not recommended to use talcum powder in the treatment area.

Moisturising

E45 cream is the recommended moisturiser for use during treatment and can be applied as often as you want, though make sure it is fully absorbed before any treatment appointment. Check any other products with your radiographers before using them as not all skincare products are suitable for use during treatment. Please also let them know if you are using any creams or lotions for a pre-existing skin condition before your treatment begins.

[If your skin appears to be getting worse after radiotherapy, please do not hesitate to contact us or visit your GP for advice and dressings if required.](#)

Deodorant

Please do not use a spray deodorant or body spray in the area being treated. If you do use a deodorant, it must be one that does not contain metal or alcohol, such as a crystal or mineral deodorant stick. Most other deodorants are aluminium based. Please check with your radiographer before using any deodorant or other product if you are unsure, and stop using all types of deodorant if your skin becomes red or sore.

Breathlessness

You may feel breathless during your treatment. If you were breathless or had a cough before treatment, it may get worse temporarily. This can be quite uncomfortable for a while and could affect your lifestyle for a period of time after your treatment has finished. Please discuss this with your doctor in case they can suggest some medication to help this.

Swallowing difficulties and indigestion

If you are receiving radiotherapy to the central part of your chest, you may find that swallowing becomes painful during treatment. You may also experience indigestion between meals and when you lie down. Your radiographers can advise

on changes to your eating and drinking habits to ease the discomfort. You can also be referred to a dietitian if you need further help. The problem will go away gradually once your treatment is finished. You may be advised to start some medication to help you feel better.

Your hair

Radiotherapy can cause hair loss within the treatment area, and also where the radiotherapy beams enter and leave the body. Some men lose the hair on their chest during their radiotherapy treatment. This is usually temporary, but there is a possibility that it may not grow back fully afterwards. The hair on your head will not be affected.

General tiredness

Coming for radiotherapy every day for a number of weeks can be very tiring. We recommend that you balance rest time with a gentle exercise regime, such as a 20 minute walk per day, to manage your fatigue. Eating a normal, healthy diet and drinking up to two litres of fluid a day can also help. If you are feeling extreme tiredness, please speak to the radiographers for advice.

Other considerations

Radioactivity

External radiotherapy in no way makes you radioactive. It is perfectly safe for you to be with other people, including children and pregnant women throughout your treatment.

Diet

We advise that you eat a normal, healthy, balanced diet throughout your treatment. You will need to drink more fluids than normal to keep you hydrated. If you would like more advice on your diet during your treatment, please ask your radiographer.

Clothing

When possible wear loose fitting clothing made of natural fibres such as cotton or silk, over the treatment area. This will help to reduce irritation.

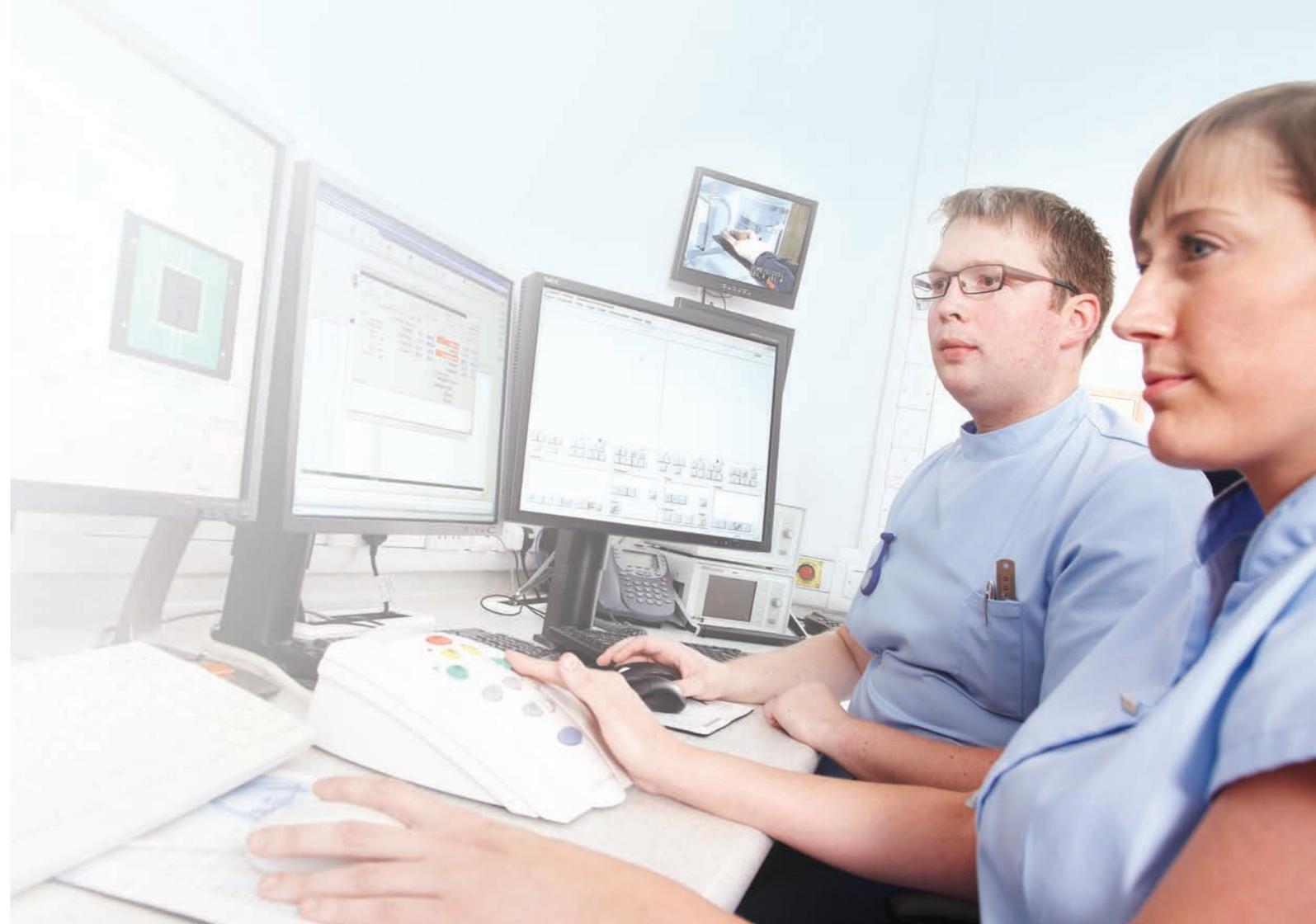
Swimming

It's fine to swim in the sea or a swimming pool during your treatment. You just need to rinse the treated area carefully after swimming to remove any chlorine or salt and moisturise using E45 cream. You are strongly advised not to swim if your skin becomes red or sore, or if the radiographers tell you that you are at high risk of developing a skin reaction.

Sun exposure

You should avoid exposing the area receiving radiotherapy to the sun during treatment and until all skin reactions have gone. Please do not use any sun protection cream during your radiotherapy treatment. It is better to protect your skin by staying in the shade and covering up with clothing.

The area of skin that has been treated will always be more sensitive to the sun. Once your treatment has finished, you should always protect the treated area by using at least SPF 50 sun block.



Further information

If you would like more information or have any other questions, don't hesitate to ask your radiographer or consultant. We are happy to help and want to ensure that your radiotherapy treatment is as comfortable and trouble free as possible.

We can also help you with access to useful websites including our Cancer Partners UK website:

www.cancerpartnersuk.org

www.macmillan.org.uk



CANCER PARTNERS UK

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