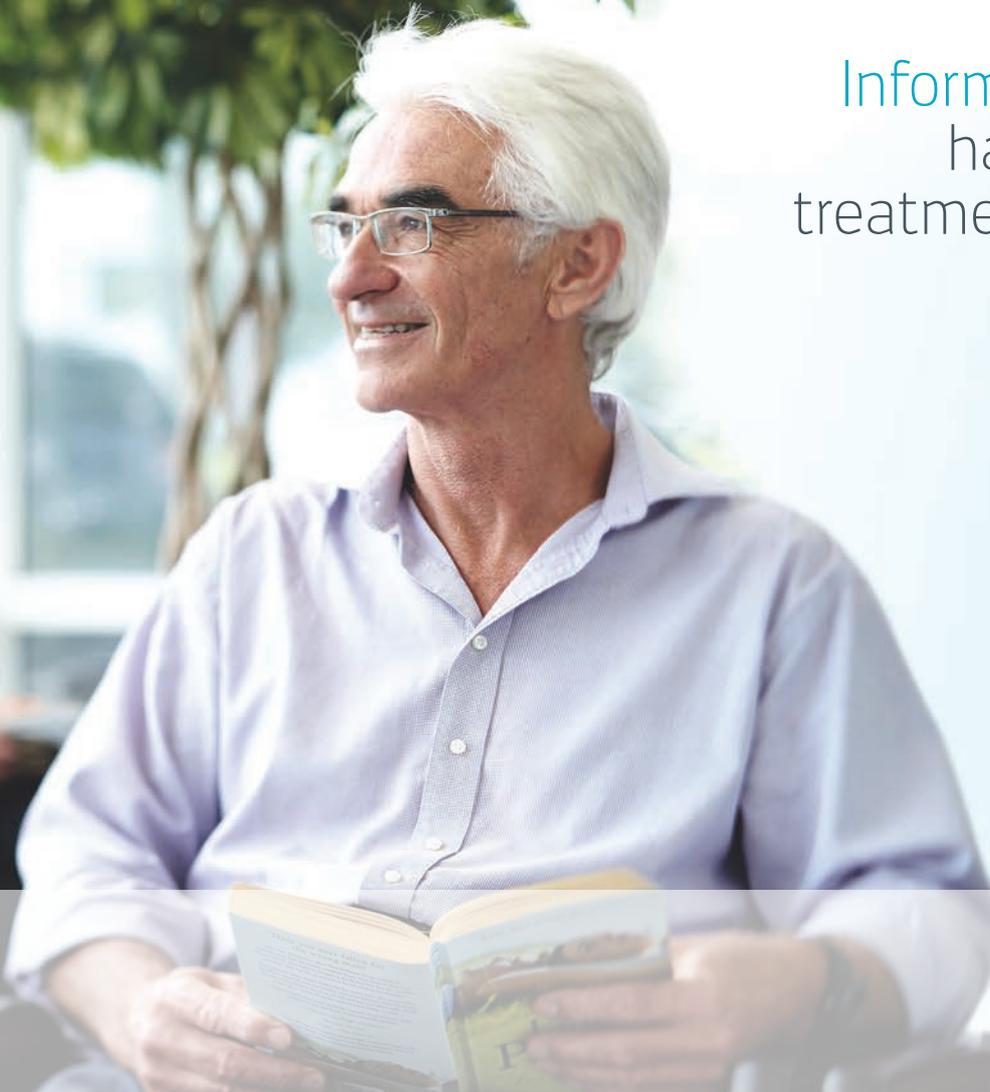


Information for patients  
having radiotherapy  
treatment to the prostate



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

You need to follow the guidelines for bladder and bowel preparation outlined in this leaflet before your CT planning scan and your daily radiotherapy treatment. Ideally, bowel preparation should start one week before your scan and continue until you have finished all your radiotherapy. Bladder preparation needs to happen on the day of your scan and before each treatment.

## Bowel

Bowel preparation improves the accuracy of your treatment by reducing the build up of intestinal gas and keeping the size and shape of your bowel consistent. This reduces the risk of long-term side effects to the bowel.

### To prepare your bowel from one week prior to your scan and throughout your treatment:

- Eat small and frequent meals, regularly spaced throughout the day and avoid skipping meals
- 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
- Keep physically active
- Maintain a normal diet while avoiding anything that makes you feel bloated or gives you excessive wind e.g - Nuts, pulses and spicy food.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well to break it down and make it more easily digestible
- Avoid swallowing air by chewing with your mouth closed, not talking with a full mouth, and sipping drinks rather than gulping. Chewing gum is best avoided altogether.

## Bladder

It is important that you have a comfortably full bladder and maintain a similar bladder size for your CT planning scan and each treatment to ensure accuracy on a daily basis. A full bladder will limit the amount of bladder and small bowel appearing in the treatment area, reducing possible side effects.

## On the day of your appointment

- Empty your bowels anytime before your appointment on the day of your scan or treatment
- Empty your bladder about 30 minutes prior to your appointment
- Drink 750ml of water, approximately 3½ cups, after emptying your bladder (water is available in the waiting area)

By following the above routine, your bladder should be comfortably full by the time you have your CT planning scan and for each treatment.

## Important note

**It is important for your general health to eat and drink normally. Please do not alter your diet dramatically during the course of your treatment.**

If you have difficulty following these instructions at any time during your treatment, please inform your radiographers immediately. You should only modify bowel or bladder preparation after discussion and agreement with your treatment radiographers.

## 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. In general 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 prostate 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 radiographers 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.

### Taking 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.

**If your skin is red and sore, and appears to be getting worse, please seek further advice from the team. Please do not apply any creams to the area.**

### Bladder irritation

The lining of your bladder may become irritated making you feel the need to pass urine frequently. Inflammation, and sometimes an infection, can also cause some pain. You may be asked to provide a urine sample to check for infection, especially if the symptoms come on very quickly. To combat this, ensure you drink plenty of fluids. Barley water or cranberry juice can

sometimes ease the discomfort, but do not drink cranberry juice if you are taking Warfarin. Inflammation of the prostate may result in slowing of the urine stream or incomplete bladder emptying. Your doctor may recommend medication to help this. Please speak to a radiographer if you experience any problems with your bladder, especially if you are unable to urinate at all, or if you experience pain.

### Diarrhoea

This common side effect can often be controlled by altering your diet. We can provide advice and a low irritant fibre diet sheet to help you. Fibre supplements such as Normacol or Fybogel may help. You can also take Loperamide (Imodium) tablets, which are available over the counter at pharmacies. Please speak to your radiographer if you need any help or if you are already on any medication for your bowels.

### Hair loss

You may lose your hair in the pubic area and when it grows back it will be more sparse. The hair on your head will not be affected.

### Changes in sexual function

Your ability to achieve or maintain an erection may decrease over time after your radiotherapy. Your consultant should have discussed this with you during your initial consultation. However, if you have any concerns during your treatment, please speak to one of your radiographers or your consultant who will be able to provide advice. There is no reason to abstain from sexual activity during radiotherapy or after.

### 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 healthy diet and drinking 1.5 to 2 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.

### 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, and particularly for the first year after treatment 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](http://www.cancerpartnersuk.org)

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)



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