

## Notes/Questions:

## References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email [patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk)

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.



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Excellence in rural healthcare



# Radiotherapy to the Breast or Chest Wall

Lincolnshire Oncology Centre  
Radiotherapy  
Chemotherapy (Ingham Suite)  
Lincoln County Hospital  
01522 572268  
[www.ulh.nhs.uk](http://www.ulh.nhs.uk)

The aim of this leaflet is to support you during your treatment and remind you of the information given by your doctor and radiographers.

**If you have a pacemaker or ICD (Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator) please let staff know as this is important information when planning your treatment.**

### **Important Information**

If you have had fluid drained from your breast or chest wall area since your operation, this may need doing again before your radiotherapy planning.

If you notice that the fluid is building up again, please contact the Breast Unit that you have attended and arrange to have this fluid drained 1-2 days before coming for your planning appointment. This will save time on the day of your CT planning scan.

If you have any questions about these instructions please call:

**01522 572236** (a Radiographer will call you back).

### **Pregnancy**

For ladies below the age of 55 years, we will need to ask you to sign on the consent form that you are not pregnant at the planning scan and also on the first day of your treatment.

**If you think you may be pregnant at any time during your course of treatment it is very important that you tell a member of staff immediately.**

### **What is Radiotherapy?**

Radiotherapy is the controlled and precise use of radiation to treat cancer and some non-cancerous conditions. External Beam Radiotherapy is delivered using a machine called a Linear Accelerator (Linac). This is pictured on the next page.

### **Final Note**

The staff in the Oncology Department are here to help you. If you have any problems or worries, please seek our help and advice.

### **Useful Numbers:**

**Radiotherapy (Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm)  
Tel:01522 572268**

### **Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists:**

**Lincoln** 573790/572632/597644

**Grantham** 464764 **Boston** 445998

**Out of Hours/Bank Holidays  
Waddington Unit Tel: 01522 572255/572257**

### **Helpful Websites:**

Lincolnshire Oncology Centre  
[www.ulh.nhs.uk/services/cancer-services/](http://www.ulh.nhs.uk/services/cancer-services/)

Breast Cancer Care/The Breast Cancer Support Charity  
<https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/>

Breast Cancer/Cancer Research UK  
[www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/breast-cancer/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/type/breast-cancer/)

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

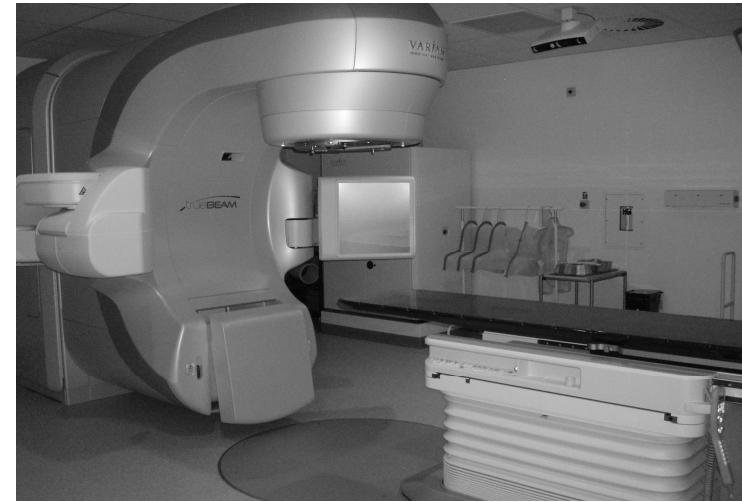
3. **Swelling in your arm (Lymphoedema)** may develop in fewer than 20% of patients (but it is noticeable in less than 5%). Your breast care nurse should be contacted if this occurs.
4. **The treated breast can feel slightly firmer** compared to the untreated breast. It may also shrink, although this is only noticeable in 10% of patients.
5. **Breast pain and tenderness** can develop several months after treatment. This affects up to 30% of patients but is more noticeable in about 10%.
6. **Damage to the Lungs** causing breathlessness (1 to 5% of patients).
7. **Damage to the Ribs** causing them to be more fragile in the future (1 to 5% of patients).
8. **Damage to the Heart** when the Left Breast or Chest-wall is treated (1 to 5% of patients).

**We take great care to treat the minimum amount of heart and lung tissue and only a small percentage of patients will develop even one of these long term effects.**

9. **Damage to the nerves** (brachial plexus neuropathy) is extremely rare but can cause numbness, pain and weakness in the arm and hand.

## Care in the Sun

**After radiotherapy, the area treated will always be more sensitive to the sun.** It is advisable to keep this area covered for the first year after radiotherapy and then always wear a high factor sun cream. You should not use a sunbed.



The radiation is given through the skin to the area affected, often from multiple directions.

This is completely painless and treatment takes minutes.

Radiotherapy is often used in combination with surgery, chemotherapy and hormone therapy. Each person's treatment is different and planned individually.

## Preparing For Your Treatment

**If you currently smoke, then stopping smoking before you start your radiotherapy is one of the best things you can do to help yourself.** Smoking can worsen side effects from Radiotherapy and also limit the effectiveness of treatment.

There is help available to support you.

**QUIT 51 Stop Smoking Service.** Please ring **0800 622 6968** OR text 'smokefree' to **66777** to refer yourself to the service.

**If you are unable to stop smoking completely then we advise stopping for 2 hours before and 2 hours after your treatment.**

**It is important to eat a well-balanced healthy diet with plenty of fluids while preparing for and having treatment.** If you are having problems with your appetite or need any advice please speak to the staff.

**Staying active is very important.** The benefits of exercise are not just physical.

Exercise can help lift your mood and alleviate fatigue. A gentle walk, gardening or house work can help to keep you more active, but it is important to listen to your body.

## **Getting to the Department**

**The Radiotherapy Department is the large building to the left of Main Reception, opposite the staff car park.** There is a coffee/snack shop (open from 9.00am until 3.00pm). There are toilets and water available in our waiting room.

## **Reception**

**When you first arrive you will need to book in to reception.** On your first visit a Radiographer will come and explain what will happen and answer any questions and our receptionists are always happy to assist you.

## **Parking**

**There is free parking for all people having Radiotherapy and Chemotherapy.** Our reception staff will validate your parking ticket each day as you leave the department.

**If you park in the Disabled Car Park,** you will need to take your blue badge in to the Main Reception on your first visit and they

biscuits, ginger beer or stem ginger. Peppermint products can also help but we can also organise medication if this is required. Please speak to the staff.

## **Fatigue**

**You may feel tired or lethargic during your radiotherapy treatment and for a number of weeks after your treatment has finished.**

This lethargy can also affect your mood and emotions. Keeping active can help combat fatigue but it is important to listen to your body and rest if you feel unwell.

## **Potential Late Side Effects**

Modern equipment and treatment techniques have reduced long term side effects but they may still occur in a small number of patients. These include:

1. **Telangectasia** - this is a change in the colour of the skin of the area being treated. This is caused by the tiny blood vessels in the skin that become swollen and are more visible. This occurs in 10% of patients.

Telangectasia is not painful but can be noticeable. If you are affected by this you can be referred to a skin make-up camouflage service.

(Changing faces skin camouflage service. Telephone 0300 012 0276. <https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/Skin-Camouflage>.)

2. **Reduced Shoulder movement** on the side of the operation or treatment, in approximately 10% of patients (it is more noticeable in 5%.)

It is wise to continue with the arm exercises you were given after surgery.

You will also be given a finishing letter from the department with information and contact numbers for once you are finished.

## Possible Side Effects

Radiotherapy affects people in different ways and you may experience different side effects to someone having similar treatment to you. Radiotherapy is a localised treatment, which means only the area having treatment will be affected.

**Radiotherapy has a build-up effect and often people do not notice any side effects until about 10 days into a course** but this also means that side effects will continue for a couple of weeks after treatment too. Some patients may have some permanent side effects from treatment but this will be discussed with you.

## Skin

**Most people will have a skin reaction**, but this will vary from mild redness to feeling quite sore with some skin peeling. We tend to see worse reactions where there are natural skin folds or friction, for example, in the armpit and under the breast.

**It is fine to wash as normal** and for you to continue with your usual soap, shower gel, deodorant and body lotions. We do ask that you avoid talcum powder, medicated/antibiotic creams, extremes of temperature (hot water bottles/ice packs).

**You will be seen once a week by a Review Radiographer, who will advise you about any other care for your skin.**

## Nausea

**Radiotherapy to the breast or chest wall very rarely makes you feel sick.** If you do notice that you are feeling sick, it can be helpful to try foods with ginger in them for example; ginger

will reimburse you. On subsequent visits (for treatment), the oncology receptionists will issue you a card with your treatment dates on it to display alongside your blue badge in the car.

## Arranging Transport

**If you are able to get to the hospital, either by car or by public transport, this is the preferred option.** This is perfectly acceptable unless your doctor has advised you otherwise. There are regular buses that come in to the hospital site, please see the stage coach website for details.

<https://www.stagecoachbus.com/>

There is also a service called **Call Connect**, which is a minibus service that can be booked from around Lincolnshire - see the website below for details:

[www.lincsinterconnect.com](http://www.lincsinterconnect.com)

There are also voluntary car schemes which can be booked via the Lincolnshire County Council website. Please note there is a subsidised charge to this service.

<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/.../community-transport/28561.article>

**If you have problems travelling from home each day we may be able to offer help with transport.** Please note that there are criteria for ambulance bookings and you may not be eligible. If you use the ambulance service you should be aware that you will be away from home for at least half a day. Transport is for the benefit of patients only and escorts may only be booked in exceptional circumstances; please discuss this with the staff.

## Treatment Planning

**Your first appointment will be a planning session.** This will be in our CT Scanner (pictured below).



This scan allows us to plan exactly where you will have your treatment and the best position for you to lie in. We will ask to make some permanent skin marks (little ink dots) to help position you accurately for each treatment.

**If you are still wearing a compression bra - It is important not to wear it on the night before or for your CT planning appointment please.** This is so that your breast tissue will be more relaxed. You should not need your compression bra more than 6 weeks after surgery and so should not be wearing this during your radiotherapy treatment.

## Planning

**There may be a number of weeks between your planning appointment and starting treatment.** It takes time to plan your treatment. This is a complicated process that involves a number of staff but ensures the best treatment for you.

## Treatment

The number of treatments, sometimes called fractions, varies and will be discussed with you by your Doctor. Radiotherapy is usually given as an out-patient with daily treatments from Monday to Friday each week.

**Treatment is painless and very quick (minutes)** and although the Radiographers leave the room to treat you, they can see you on closed circuit cameras at all times.

It is important that you keep as still as possible and breathe normally but if you need the Radiographers during your treatment, please raise your hand and they will come straight to you.

**You will not be radioactive during your treatment and it is safe for you to be with other people, including children.**

## Follow-up

**You will be seen by your consultant 4-8 weeks after completing your treatment.** This appointment will be where you were originally seen (i.e. not always in Lincoln).