

## Useful Numbers:

**Radiotherapy (Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm)**

**Tel:01522 572268**

## Clinical Nurse Specialists:

Lincoln (01522 573126)

Boston (01205 445762)

## 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/)

Macmillan Cancer Support

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

Cancer Research UK

[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

## 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  
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Excellence in rural healthcare



# Radiotherapy for Gynaecological Cancer

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.

## **Preparing For Your Treatment**

### **Bladder Preparation**

**We need you to have a full bladder for your scan and treatment each day. This is to help minimise any side effects.**

**Bladder Preparation** - you will need to attend the department 1 hour before your CT scan and treatment each day. We will ask you to empty your bladder and then drink 500ml or 750ml of water/squash over 20 to 30mins. We will then ask you to sit and allow this to fill your bladder for a further 20 to 30mins. This is so that your bladder is the same for treatment every day.

**It is also very important to drink plenty of fluids throughout your treatment (limiting caffeine and alcohol) to be well hydrated.**

### **Bowel Preparation**

**We ask that you make some dietary changes** 1 to 2 weeks before your CT appointment and throughout your treatment to lessen the amount of wind in your bowels. This means avoiding foods such as: onions, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, beans/lentils, spicy food, dried fruits, artificial sweeteners and fizzy drinks.

**It is also important not to be constipated (trouble opening your bowels daily),** as this can also cause more wind. If you are constipated please see your GP for some laxatives.

**Eating and drinking well is important and if you are having any problems with your appetite please speak to staff. If you currently smoke, then stopping smoking before you**

Radiotherapy can also affect the cells in the vagina which produce a natural lubricant. This can cause a dry, uncomfortable feeling, which can make sexual intercourse uncomfortable. The use of a lubricant or vaginal moisturiser will help.

### **Bone**

Radiotherapy can affect the density of the bones in your pelvis. This is because it can cause fine cracks to develop which cause a dull ache in the pelvis. This can be treated with medication, exercise and a calcium rich diet. Please let your doctor know if you have any pain in your pelvis.

### **Lymphedema**

Radiotherapy to the pelvis can affect the normal fluid drainage from tissues, causing possible swelling of your feet, legs or pelvic area (Lymphedema). This is because the small vessels become blocked.

To minimise the chance of infection it is important to look after your legs and feet and to use an antiseptic cream on any cuts, grazes or insect bites.

Please let your Doctor or GP know if you notice any swelling of your feet, legs or pelvic area after you have had radiotherapy.

### **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.

**has finished.** Keeping active can help but it is important to listen to your body and if you feel unwell, to rest. Your normal activities at home will help to keep you active and if you feel able, a daily walk can be beneficial.

This lethargy can also affect your mood and emotions. This is normal but please speak to staff for support.

## Potential Late Side Effects

**Long term side effects can occur months or years after radiotherapy treatment.** There is no way to predict who might be affected, but these would be permanent changes. We plan the treatment to avoid surrounding areas as much as possible to minimize the risk of these side effects.

### Bladder and Bowel

Radiotherapy tends to make tissues less stretchy and so your bladder may feel fuller faster as it won't stretch as much and you may need to pass water more often.

We may also affect your bowels. After treatment you may notice looser stools and frequency but some people notice that the bowels are slower and can have some constipation. Please speak to your doctor if you notice any of these changes.

You can notice a little blood in your urine or your motions. This is because radiotherapy can cause the development of small blood vessels in the area treated and these blood vessels can bleed more easily.

### Vaginal Narrowing (stenosis)

As the vaginal tissues heal after radiotherapy, small scars or adhesions (areas of tissue that have become connected) can form. There can also be some hardening of the tissues which can make the vagina shorter and narrower. This can make future vaginal examinations and sexual intercourse more difficult and uncomfortable.

**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.**

**Staying active is very important.** The benefits of exercise are not just physical. Exercise can help lift your mood and help to 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.



## 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) pictured above. The radiation is given through the skin to the area affected, often from multiple directions. This is completely painless and treatment takes minutes.

- \* **Brachytherapy** is internal radiotherapy and if you are to have this treatment, you will receive another leaflet.

**You may have one or both of these types of radiotherapy.** Your doctor will discuss the type and length of treatment with you, as each person has their treatment planned individually.

**Radiotherapy is often used in combination with surgery and chemotherapy.**

### **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 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

### **Bladder Symptoms**

When we treat the pelvis, for cancer of the Endometrium (womb), Ovary, Cervix and Vagina, the bladder is included in the treatment area and because of this you may feel some discomfort when passing urine.

You may also want to pass urine more often. To make sure your symptoms are not caused by an infection a sample of your urine may be tested every week during treatment. **Drinking plenty of fluids will also help to keep your bladder flushed.**

### **Bowel Symptoms**

Your bowel habits may change during radiotherapy, for example, your stools may become loose or you may develop diarrhoea. If this happens tell your radiographer and medication can be prescribed for you.

During treatment you may suffer from lower abdominal pain or discomfort. Again tell your radiographer or doctor who may prescribe some pain relief or specialist medication to ease this.

### **Changes in your Blood**

Radiotherapy can sometimes affect your bone marrow, which produces the different types of blood cells. To check this you may have weekly checks of your blood count (that is, the number of cells in your blood). If your blood count is low you may feel tired and 'run down' and treatment may be necessary.

### **Vaginal Discharge**

The vagina may become irritated and feel sore and tight. You may also notice an increase in vaginal discharge. You may have a **Feminine Care appointment** during your treatment. At this appointment a radiographer will talk to you about using vaginal dilators and you will be given a set.

### **Fatigue**

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

**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. If you are having chemotherapy as well as radiotherapy you are likely to have more side effects.

**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 groins and between the buttocks. If we are treating very sensitive areas like the vulva and vagina, it is also more likely that you will have a skin reaction and soreness during treatment and this will continue for a few weeks after treatment has finished.

**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 pelvis can make you feel sick.** If you do notice this, it can be helpful to try foods with ginger in them for example; ginger biscuits, ginger beer or stem ginger. Peppermint products can also help but we can also organise medication if needed. Please speak to the staff.

## **Loss of Appetite**

**It is common to lose your appetite during treatment.** We advise eating small meals/snacks more frequently and we can refer you to a dietitian to advise and support you.

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.

**We may use contrast (a special dye that gives us better pictures) at your scan appointment.** This will be given through a cannula into a vein in your arm. This will involve a sharp scratch but should be relatively painless.

**It is important to drink plenty of water in the days before your appointment so that you are well hydrated.** This is also important for a few days after your scan, to help your body flush out the contrast.

**If you are a diabetic, taking Metformin, you will need to contact the department please, to check if you need to stop taking this before or after the scan.**

The staff will explain the procedure fully when you attend for your appointment but if you have any queries please contact the department before your appointment.

If it is difficult to find a vein and staff are unable to place the cannula or you are unable to have contrast, for medical reasons, we can still scan and plan your treatment without contrast.

**We may also need to insert a small applicator** (like a tampon) in to your vagina at the planning CT scan. This is to help the Doctor plan your treatment and will be removed after the scan.

### **Important Information**

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

### **Pregnancy**

**If you are female and below the age of 55 years,** we will need to ask you to sign on the consent form that you are not pregnant. 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.

### **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.** 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). 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.