

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

Clinical Nurse Specialists: 01522 597592

Out of Hours/Bank Holidays

Waddington Unit

Tel: 01522 572255/572257

Helpful Websites:

Lincolnshire Oncology Centre

www.ulh.nhs.uk/services/cancer-services/

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk/

Cancer Research UK

www.cancerresearchuk.org

References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk

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



If you require this information in another language, large print, audio (CD or tape) or braille please email the Patient Information team at patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk

Radiotherapy to the Head and Neck

Lincolnshire Oncology Centre
Radiotherapy
Chemotherapy (Ingham Suite)
Lincoln County Hospital
01522 572268
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.

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

Radiotherapy can be used in combination with surgery and chemotherapy but each person's treatment is different and planned individually.



secretaries and also the radiotherapy department, if you have any queries before your follow-up appointment.

Late Effects

Long term side effects can occur months or years after radiotherapy treatment. These are hard to predict but would be permanent changes. We plan the treatment to avoid surrounding areas as much as possible to minimise the risk of these side effects.

Damage to the **salivary glands** can cause dryness of the mouth and an increased risk of dental disease. **Regular dental appointments and good oral care are important.**

Even a moderate dose of radiotherapy to the **lens of the eye** increases the risk of cataract.

When the ear is treated, there is a possibility of damage to the **inner ear**. This increases the risk of hearing problems, which may be permanent. Likewise, if the tube from the back of the mouth to the ear receives radiotherapy, the ears can become blocked (glue ear). If this does not clear naturally, this is treatable.

Higher doses to the soft tissues of the throat, particularly under the chin can cause some underlying thickening, which may be uncomfortable and affect normal movement.

Care in the Sun

After radiotherapy, the area treated will always be more sensitive to the sun. It is advisable to wear a hat and always wear a high factor sun cream. You should not use a sunbed.

Please use this space for any notes/questions:

Loss of Appetite - Nutrition

Radiotherapy can affect your appetite and you will notice changes to your taste buds. In some cases radiotherapy can make you feel sick. We advise eating little and often and eating softer, bland foods when your taste starts to change. Peppermint or ginger products can help but we can also organise medication if needed.

As treatment continues, the side effects will gradually worsen. You may already have a feeding tube which will be used for medicines, fluids and food when swallowing becomes more difficult. You will have a specialist dietitian to support you and this should help you to complete your treatment as an out-patient.

It is important to keep swallowing for as long as possible during treatment, even if you are using a feeding tube. This helps keep the muscles involved with swallowing strong and will help your recovery.

Seeing Your Doctor

You will see your consultant each week to check how you are feeling during your treatment. We will also weigh you and take some photographs to monitor any reactions.

We also advise if you are feeling unwell and your appointment is after 4.00pm, to always contact the department as soon as possible so that we can advise and support you.

Follow-up

You will be seen by your consultant 4 to 8 weeks after completing your treatment. This appointment will be where you were originally seen (i.e. not always in Lincoln). On your last day of treatment you will also be given a finishing letter from the department. This letter has contact numbers for the doctor's

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 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.

If you have a pacemaker or ICD (Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator) please let staff know. This is important information when planning your treatment. For more information speak to staff.

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 which is staffed by volunteers (opening times vary). 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 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

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>

Throat and Mouth

The treatment will cause the mouth and throat to swell and become sore. This will make swallowing and eating uncomfortable. This usually starts towards the end of the second week of treatment. We advise eating softer foods and avoiding spicy and acidic foods. Soluble paracetamol can help at first but your doctor will prescribe stronger painkillers.

You will also notice that your saliva becomes thicker as the radiotherapy will affect your salivary glands. Drinking plenty of fluids is important and will help, but we can also prescribe mouth washes.

Good oral care is very important as usually the saliva helps to keep your mouth clean. We recommend the regular use of a soft toothbrush and childrens toothpaste and you may have been given a booklet by your Head and Neck nurse about this. Please speak to staff if you have any questions.

Radiotherapy can tighten the muscles in your jaw (this is called Trismus) and this can make opening your mouth more difficult. You may find your eating and speech can be affected.

Your voice may be affected if we are treating your voicebox (larynx), try to rest your voice as much as possible. It might be useful to carry a pen and paper with you so you can write messages, rather than talking.

Hair Loss

Unfortunately you will lose some hair in the area being treated. This normally happens 2 to 3 weeks after starting radiotherapy. Hair loss can be permanent or patchy and can take 4 to 5 months to re-grow.

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.**

Medications

It is important to continue with any medications that you usually take. We recommend organising soluble or liquid forms of these medications with your GP before treatment starts, so that you are still able to take them when your swallowing is affected. Please bring a list of your current medications when you start your treatment.

Skin

Most people will have a skin reaction, this will vary from mild reddening to feeling sore with some skin peeling. We tend to see worse reactions where there are natural skin folds or friction, for example, behind the ears. Also when people are having chemotherapy and radiotherapy together. **It is fine to wash as normal** but we recommend **not** wet shaving but using an electric shaver for gentlemen and to avoid make-up in the treatment area for ladies.

Fatigue

You may feel tired or lethargic during your radiotherapy treatment and for some weeks after your treatment has finished. This lethargy can also affect your mood and emotions. Keeping as active as possible can help combat fatigue but it is important to listen to your body and if you feel unwell, to rest.

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). This scan allows us to plan exactly where you will have your treatment and the best position for you to lie in.

We may use contrast (a special dye that gives us better pictures) at your scan appointment.

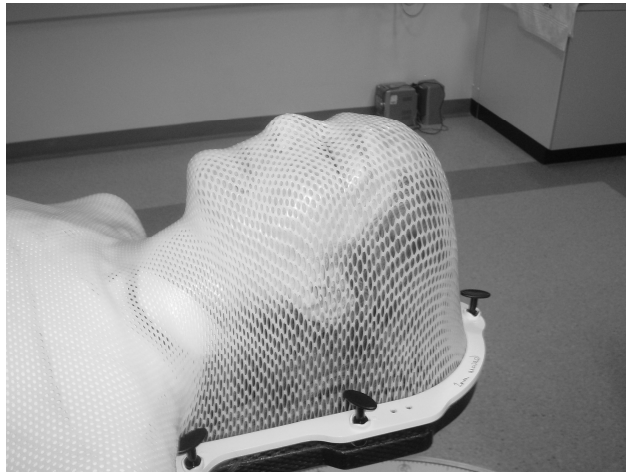
This will be given through a cannula into a vein in your arm. This will involve a sharp scratch but should be relatively painless. It is important to drink well in the days before your appointment so that you are well hydrated. This is also important for a few days after your scan to help your body flush 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 will need to make a cast of your head and shoulders to hold you in the right position for treatment (pictured above).

This cast or mask will need to be worn each day for your treatment and is made from a thermoplastic material with holes in it, so that you can breathe as normal.

The material is heated and then a Radiographer will place it over your face and head and it stretches and moulds to your shape. It feels like a warm flannel and as it cools it hardens to hold you in the correct position. This takes a few minutes and then it is ready.

It may feel snug but we need it to fit well for treatment and some of the marks for treatment will be drawn on to the mask.

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.

Possible Side Effects

Radiotherapy affects people in different ways and you may experience different side effects to someone having similar treatment to you.

If you are having Radiotherapy and Chemotherapy you are likely to have worse side effects, as they work together.