

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.

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

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

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 for Rectal Cancer or Cancer of the Anal Canal

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

Your doctor will discuss the type and length of treatment with you, as each person has their treatment planned individually.



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.

feel embarrassed, but your doctor and staff are used to talking about these issues and can offer advice and support.

Fatigue

You may feel tired or lethargic during your radiotherapy treatment and for a number of weeks after your treatment 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 minimise 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. This can improve with time but occasionally patients require a permanent stoma. 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.

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.

Antibiotics will not help BUT drinking plenty of fluids will keep your bladder flushed. To make sure your symptoms are not caused by an infection, a sample of your urine may be tested during treatment. **To help minimise these symptoms, we will ask you to have a full bladder for treatment.**

Bowel Symptoms

After the first couple of weeks of treatment your bowel habits may change, 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.

After three or four weeks of treatment you may notice some discomfort on opening your bowels. This is called proctitis and is caused by inflammation in the back passage.

Sometimes you may feel the urge to pass a motion but are unable to pass anything. This is called **Tenesmus** and some people mistake this for constipation. You may also notice you are passing some mucus and a little blood. Please speak to staff as there is medication to ease this.

Fertility

Radiotherapy to the pelvis will cause infertility for women and will also affect fertility in men. But care still needs to be taken to avoid pregnancy during treatment. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

Sexuality

Bowel cancer and it's treatment can affect your sex life and how you view your body (body image). Difficulties may result from both physical and emotional affects of treatment. We recognise it can be difficult to talk about this subject and you may

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.

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 45 minutes before your CT scan and treatment each day. We will ask you to empty your bladder and then drink 500 ml of water/squash over 20 mins. We will than ask you to sit and allow this to fill your bladder for a further 20 mins.

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 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 to stop smoking. **QUIT 51 Stop Smoking Service.** Please ring **0800 622 6968** OR text 'smoke free' 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.

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.

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

For Ladies

You may notice an increase in vaginal discharge and have some discomfort and tightness. You will 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.

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.

Bladder Symptoms

When we treat the pelvis, some of the bladder is included in the treatment area. This can cause some discomfort when passing urine and you may feel the need to empty your bladder more often.

You may also want to pass urine more urgently. This is because the radiotherapy can irritate the bladder. **This can be mistaken for a urinary infection or cystitis but is generally Radiation Cystitis caused by the radiotherapy.**

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). 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.

If you are having chemotherapy as well as radiotherapy you are likely to have more side effects 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 including sensitive areas like the genitals (private parts), it is also more likely that you will have a skin reaction and soreness during treatment. **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).

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>

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 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 also ask you to have a full bladder for this scan and for each of your radiotherapy treatments. This is to help to lessen the side effects to your bladder and bowel.**

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.