Palliative radiotherapy to the lung (or bronchus)

Radiotherapy

A guide for patients and carers
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This information is for people who are going to receive palliative radiotherapy to their lung.

This leaflet will:

- Explain when radiotherapy is given
- Tell you about the side effects during and after radiotherapy
- Give advice on how to cope with these side effects
- Give contact details if you need further advice

You might find it helpful to read The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre booklet Radiotherapy, which explains how radiotherapy works and what to expect when you attend.

Radiotherapy is given

- To relieve the symptoms of lung cancer e.g. chest pain, breathlessness, coughing up blood or
- To prevent these symptoms developing

The number of treatments that you require will be decided by your doctor. This can range from a single treatment to a course over a few weeks.
Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) Service
The Lung Cancer CNS is based at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre in Wirral to ensure that all patients (and/or carers) who have a diagnosis of lung cancer have access to written and verbal information on all issues surrounding the management of lung cancer, advice on treatment options, psychological support and symptom management. Ask for more information if you think you may benefit from a referral.

Side effects of radiotherapy
The usual pattern for the development of short term (acute) side effects is to gradually start about 5-10 days after the first treatment. The effects are most troublesome about 10 days after the last radiotherapy treatment. After this the healing process begins and the side effects usually settle over the following 2-3 weeks.

Discomfort when Swallowing (Dysphagia)
If your treatment includes the central area of your chest, you may develop pain and discomfort. The gullet (oesophagus) passes through the middle of the chest and can become inflamed (sore) as a result of your radiotherapy. Often it feels like heartburn or indigestion and is worse when swallowing. You may notice this after a few days of treatment.

You can help yourself by:
- Informing your radiographers or nurse if you have discomfort when you swallow so that they can give you advice and get medication for you
• Eating soft foods that are easy to swallow. Adding extra moisture such as gravy and sauces can help
• Drinking more fluid, small sips frequently is best
• Eating smaller meals more often if your gullet is sore
• Avoid, until any discomfort has settled, any food or drink that is very hot, cold or highly spiced. You may find fruit juice and drinks containing alcohol worsen the symptoms

**Tiredness and Fatigue (low energy levels)**
You may feel increasingly tired during your course of radiotherapy and for a few weeks afterwards. Remaining as active as you are able can help you feel less tired. Active means anything that requires effort such as walking, preparing a meal etc. Try to include things you enjoy, no matter how simple the activity.

**Nutritional Care**
Eating as well as you can, can help you to cope with and recover from the treatment. Our dieticians have written a leaflet “Eating Well Coping with Side Effects” which is available to you. If you need further advice from a dietician, this can be arranged following referral. You may be seen at the hospital during your treatment or at home by a community dietician (following referral by a hospital dietician, GP or district nurse).

**Cough and Breathlessness**
In order to treat the cancer some normal lung tissue can not be avoided. We try to ensure that the dose to healthy lung tissue is kept as low as possible while ensuring that the cancer is treated adequately.
If you have a cough before treatment it may worsen and you may produce more phlegm. This should settle within a few weeks of finishing treatment. If at any time if you produce phlegm that is thick and yellow/green it may indicate that you have a chest infection. Seek advice from health care staff. You may see blood in the phlegm. Do not be alarmed if this continues or starts over the course of treatment. Tell us about it especially if is more than usual.

You may experience some increase in breathlessness during or after your treatment. If you have concerns seek advice from healthcare staff.

If breathlessness affects your daily activities there are simple ways of improving this including breathing exercises and learning to plan and prioritise tasks. For more information and advice ask to see our Lung Cancer CNS or contact Macmillan Cancer Support or the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation.

In some cases radiotherapy can cause permanent scarring of lung tissue which may lead to a permanent increase in breathlessness.
Skin Care
Areas of skin around your chest may become dry, red or uncomfortable. If you develop any skin soreness, report it to your radiographer or nurse who will advise you further on skin care. You can help yourself by wearing loose fitting clothes across your chest area preferably made of a natural fibre. Wash the area gently in lukewarm water using a mild un perfumed soap. A shower is best. Pat the area dry with a soft towel. Hair loss may occur in the areas being treated, which usually regrows following treatment.

Other effects
The diagnosis of cancer together with the impact of treatment e.g. needing radiotherapy can have a major impact on how you feel, which can affect how you behave. Some symptoms may affect your life in ways you don’t expect e.g. breathlessness affecting sexual intimacy.

If you are able, talking about how you feel with health care staff can be a great help. Sometimes more help is required to help you cope and overcome any negative feelings.

Often, these feelings become more apparent once you have completed all your treatments. You should discuss these issues with your G.P. or your oncology doctor at your follow-up appointments. Referrals to specialist staff e.g. a psychologist or occupational therapist can be beneficial.
Follow-up and recovery
As you complete your radiotherapy, your care needs will be assessed. If you develop any new nursing needs as a result of radiotherapy we can make arrangements for a district nurse to visit you.

After finishing treatment your side effects will probably become more troublesome. This is usual and will settle over the next few weeks (see “Side effects of Radiotherapy “section earlier). If you are finding it hard to cope (especially with eating and drinking) and you need help, contact our triage help line (24 hours) on 0151 334 1155 bleep 5555. If you have been affected by tiredness and fatigue, it may persist. Planning ahead, doing only the things that are necessary and having plenty of rest breaks into your routine helps. Ensure you eat as well as you can.

Most people will be seen by their oncology doctor in clinic a few weeks after finishing radiotherapy. This appointment is likely to be at your local hospital. If you have contact with other teams for ongoing supportive care e.g. Palliative care/Macmillan team staff that visit you at home, consider contacting them and/or your G.P. if you have any concerns.
Additional information

If you are limited in how far you can walk you should consider getting a Motorbility Badge (Blue badge) so that you can use the designated parking spaces. These are issued by your local council.

It may be useful to get a wheelchair. Many people find that it is helpful for some activities e.g. shopping. For further information contact your G.P. alternatively the local Red Cross supply wheelchairs on short-term loan.

People having palliative treatment become entitled to particular benefit payments or possibly the rate of any current payments is increased. Often an application is addressed by staff e.g. Lung Cancer CNS shortly after your diagnosis. If you are unsure if an application has been made, telephone the Disability Living and Attendance Allowance helpline. If you need advice we can arrange for you to see our Macmillan Welfare Benefits advisor.

You and/or your carers may find it useful to talk to others who have been treated for lung cancer by contacting a support group. Contact the local Macmillan Cancer Support or the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation for details. Alternatively if you are familiar with using the internet, the major cancer charities have on-line communities.
Contact details

The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust
0151 334 1155 or www.clatterbridgecc.nhs.uk

Lung CNS based at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre
Ring hospital number and ask for their office

Macmillan Cancer Support
0808 808 00 00 or www.macmillan.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Information and Support at
The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre
0151 482 7722 (Wirral)
0151 514 6411 (Liverpool)

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation
0151 254 7200 or www.roycastle.org

Macmillan Cancer Support and the Roy Castle Lung Cancer
Foundation have information, help and advice on how to deal with
the effects a cancer diagnosis may have. Examples of the subjects
covered include help with money advice, practical issues and the
emotional effects upon you and your relationships.
If you have any general enquiries prior to starting your treatment, please contact the Information and support radiographer at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre, Monday to Friday during office hours (9am -5pm) on 0151 334 1155 ext 4908.

If you have any concerns during or after treatment contact the Triage help line (24 hours) on 0151 334 1155 bleep 5555.
How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 482 7722.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 482 7722.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 482 7927.