



# Your child has finished radiotherapy

Radiotherapy

**A guide for patients and carers**

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These are the words which every parent has waited for since discussions about radiotherapy started. But for many, reaching the end of treatment can bring mixed emotions. You may feel happy and relieved that your child has finished this part of their journey, but you may also feel anxious.

Although your child will no longer receive radiotherapy at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre, they will continue to be part of an important aftercare support service. There is support for people living with and beyond cancer within the NHS system and your child will receive follow-up care and support well into adult life.

## What happens after the last radiotherapy appointment?

When your child finishes radiotherapy treatment, appointments will be made for your child to be seen by their cancer doctor in clinic at Alder Hey Children's Hospital. How often varies for each child, but it is usually every 6-12 weeks during the first year.

## Treatment side effects

Radiotherapy treatment is individualised, side effects may vary and depend upon a number of factors. Some of them can be relieved or controlled but sometimes not. Some of the side effects happen immediately, some of them happen soon after the treatment is finished, and some take a longer time to show. These were explained clearly during consent for your child's treatment. Below is a list of general side effects your child may experience. However, they may have other side effects depending on the area of the body that has been treated.

### Tiredness

Your child may feel very tired while they are having radiotherapy and for a weeks afterwards. This is at its worst near the end of treatment and just afterwards. There might be a particularly sleepy spell which starts 4-6 weeks after radiotherapy ends. This can go on for between 2 and 6 weeks, but can be even longer. Their energy levels may take a few months to return to normal once the treatment has finished. We advise you to let your child rest when they can – their body will let them know when they need to relax.

### Effects on the digestive system

You may find that your child loses their appetite. It may help for them to eat small snacks and meals frequently throughout the day, rather than large meals. Encourage your child to drink plenty of regular fluids. Some children feel sick (nausea) or may be sick



(vomit). Your child's GP can help prescribe medication to help with this. If the side effects of treatment altered your child's appetite or bowel habits whilst they were on treatment, continue to follow the advice you were given during treatment. Your child may have a dietician at Alder Hey that you can contact for further advice. If not, then let your child return to their usual diet slowly after two weeks of finishing radiotherapy, until their body is able to manage what is normal for them.

## Effects on the skin

Some children develop a skin reaction similar to sunburn while having radiotherapy. This can happen after 3-4 weeks of treatment. In children with pale skin, the skin in the treatment area can become red and sore or itchy.

### Skin care

Many children only have a mild skin reaction to their treatment area, but everyone reacts differently. If your child does not have a reaction by the end of treatment, they may develop one over the next few days. If this happens, they will need to keep that area covered until the reaction has settled. Your paediatric radiographer can advise what creams and dressings are available to you. We advise that you continue with the skin care routine explained to you during your child's treatment, or any further advice given after treatment until their skin returns to normal. Do not use any other products in the treatment area until then.

Once their skin has completely healed, you can follow their normal skin care procedures with regard to creams and moisturisers. The skin in the treatment area is always going to be more sensitive to the elements, so it needs to be protected either with clothing or a high factor sun cream. In the longer-term, the skin in the treated area will be more sensitive to the sun. You need to be careful to protect your child's skin from excessive exposure to sunlight by using a high-factor sun cream.

### **Washing**

You may wash the treated area gently using lukewarm water and a mild un-perfumed soap, for example, baby soap. A shower is preferable to a bath. If you don't have a shower, a quick wash in the bath is much better than a long soak. Use a hand to wash the area, rather than a flannel or sponge. Your child is likely to have pen marks on their skin, do not try to scrub these off, they will fade over a couple of weeks. Dry the treated area gently by patting with a soft towel. If your child has had radiotherapy to their head, continue to wash their hair or scalp using baby shampoo. Avoid using a hair dryer or, if necessary, use the cool setting.

### **Clothing**

Where possible, dress your child in loose clothing made of natural fibre (cotton) next to the skin in the treated area.



## Swimming

It is best to avoid swimming for up to four weeks after your child's treatment has finished. Chlorinated water can have a drying effect on the skin.

## Effects on hair

If the skin within the treatment field contains hair, radiotherapy can cause damage in the short and long-term, as discussed during consent. In the short-term, the hair may thin and fall out. In the long-term, changes include permanent loss of hair. If the hair does re-grow, there may be a change in its colour and texture. Coping with hair loss can be difficult for your child. Your Macmillan nurse at Alder Hey will be able to help your child find a wig, if you feel it's appropriate, or make some alternative suggestions.

These side effects can be very worrying at the time, but they usually settle down within 6-9 weeks. These side effects may become worse before they start to improve. This is normal and reactions will gradually settle. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact the specialist paediatric radiographer at any point who will be happy to discuss these with you.

## Long-term side effects

Radiotherapy can sometimes cause other long-term side effects as it can affect growing and developing normal cells as well as the cancer cells. Some parts of the body are more sensitive to the

effects of radiotherapy than others. They can develop gradually, months or sometimes years after treatment. Long-term side effects vary from child to child; your cancer doctor will have discussed these with you during consent. Your child will be continually monitored and assessed to ensure that if such problems occur, then they will receive the right treatment and support. Appointments will be in place for your child to be seen by their cancer doctor in clinic at Alder Hey to monitor any long-term side effects.

## Long-term follow up

As time goes on, the length between follow-up appointments usually increases to every 3 months in the second year, and then only once a year after five years have passed. The emphasis of follow-up appointments changes from monitoring side effects and checking the cancer hasn't come back, to looking for any late effects of treatment. At a point along this pathway, your child's care will be transferred to the 'late effects' clinic which has specialists trained to deal with longer-term issues that can arise following cancer treatment.

If you have any questions or need support and advice now that your child's radiotherapy has finished, please contact the paediatric radiographer on **0151 556 5701** in the first month following treatment.

A month after treatment, please contact your Alder Hey doctor, GP or Macmillan nurse.





Doctors who treat children are always interested in hearing about any side effects of treatment. If you do see your GP or a hospital doctor with a new problem, please tell them about your child's previous cancer treatment and ask them to inform your cancer doctor just in case the problem may be side effects of that treatment.

## Useful contact numbers

### **The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust**

Clatterbridge Road, Bebington, Wirral, CH63 4JY  
www.clatterbridgecc.nhs.uk Tel: 0151 556 5000

### **Radiotherapy contacts**

#### **Paediatric Specialist Radiographer -**

Tel: 0151 556 5701 Mobile: 07795686127

#### **Teenager and Young adult contacts**

**TYA Ward** - Tel: 0151 556 5023

**TYA Lead Nurse** - Tel: 0151 556 5773

**TYA MDT Co-ordinator** - Tel: 0151 556 5122

### **Hospitals with A&E departments**

#### **Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust,**

Eaton Road, West Derby, Liverpool, L12 2AP.  
Tel: 0151 228 4811

#### **Arrowe Park Hospital NHS Foundation Trust,**

Arrowe Park Road, Wirral, Merseyside, CH49 5PE.  
Tel: 0151 678 5111

#### **Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust,**

Countess of Chester Health Park, Liverpool Road Chester, CH2 1UL.  
Tel: 01244 365000





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References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

**If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.**

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