

## Minimising side effects

We advise that you give up smoking and cut or reduce your intake of alcohol, as this makes side effects potentially worse. There are smoking cessation programs available, please ask one of the staff members. We also recommend that patients aim to drink between 2-3L of fluids a day.

If you are worried about your side effects after your treatment has finished, please contact your GP or your specialist cancer nurse or refer to the phone numbers below.

## Contact Us

### Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy Basement, King George V Wing (KGV), St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield, London EC1A 7BE  
Radiotherapy Reception **020 3465 5222**  
Emergency Hotline (when the department is closed) **07917 093 738**

### Macmillan Cancer Information Centre

Vicky Clement-Jones  
Ground Floor, West Wing, St Bartholomew's Hospital.  
Just drop in Mon-Fri 10am-12noon and 2-4.30pm. Or call on **020 346 56611**. If calling outside working hours, ring Macmillan free on 0800 808 00 00 or visit the Macmillan website.

### Maggie's Centre @ St Barts

St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield, London, EC1A 7BE  
Tel: 0203 904 3448  
Drop in Mon-Fri: 9am-4pm

## Smoking Cessation

St Bartholomew's Hospital  
King George's Building (KGV) **Clinic 1**  
Drop in clinic Wednesdays 9am-1pm

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services:  
[www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals](http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals)

## Large print and other languages

This information can be made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print, and may be available in alternative languages, upon request. For more information, speak to your clinical team.

এই তথ্যগুলো সহজে পড়া যায় অথবা বৃহৎ প্রিন্টের মত বিকল্প ফরম্যাটে পাওয়া যাবে, এবং অনুরোধে অন্য ভাষায়ও পাওয়া যেতে পারে। আরো তথ্যের জন্য আপনার ক্লিনিক্যাল টিমের সাথে কথা বলুন।

Bu bilgi, kolay okunurluk veya büyük baskılar gibi alternatif biçimlerde sunulabilir, ve talep üzerine Alternatif Dillerde sunulabilir. Daha fazla bilgi için klinik ekibinizle irtibata geçin.

سڊڪ تي جاڪي دسد تياب ميں فارم يٿس متبادل معلومات يه  
پرنت بڙا يا آسان ميں پڙهڻي ڪه چيسا پين، اور درخواست  
پر متبادل زبانوں ميں بهي دستياب هو سگئي پين۔ مزيد معلومات  
ڪه ليه، اپني ڪلينيڪل ٿيم سه بات ڪريں۔

## Tell us what you think

Tweet us [@NHSBartsHealth](https://twitter.com/NHSBartsHealth)

Talk to us via [facebook.com/bartshealth](https://facebook.com/bartshealth)

Leave feedback on NHS Choices [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

©Barts Health NHS Trust  
Switchboard: 020 3416 5000  
[www.bartshealth.nhs.uk](http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk)

Reference: BH/PIN/921  
Publication date: Oct 2019  
All our patient information leaflets are reviewed every three years.

**NHS**

**Barts Health**  
NHS Trust

Patient information

# Radiotherapy to the skin

**Important: Please tell us if you have a pacemaker as we will need to monitor your heart during your treatment.**

**Please let us know if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.**

It is important to remember that you need to use contraception whilst receiving treatment for cancer in order to prevent pregnancy – please see our leaflet 'Avoiding pregnancy during radiotherapy and chemotherapy'.



## **Introduction**

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy x-rays to treat cancer and some other diseases. It can be delivered to the skin by one of two radiation machines – linear accelerators (Linac) or superficial/orthovoltage (Xstrahl) machines.

The linear accelerator and superficial/orthovoltage machines both deliver carefully measured doses of radiation to the area of skin that needs treatment. Radiation is invisible and painless, though you are likely to experience some side effects which will be explained later in this leaflet.

Some people may only need one session of radiotherapy, others may require up to 30 daily treatments.

## **What happens during a Radiotherapy session?**

You will be positioned on the treatment couch so that the radiographers can place the machine over the area to be treated (this will be the same every day). Once you are lying on the treatment couch, the radiographers will guide you into the correct position. They will check various measurements before starting treatment.

The treatment appointment will last between 10-40 minutes every day. Most of this time will be taken getting you into the correct position for treatment. The radiographers will operate the treatment machine from outside the room. You will be left alone for between five and twenty minutes during each session whilst you receive your radiation treatment, but the radiographer will be watching you on a closed circuit television system at all times.

If you need the radiographers for any reason, all you have to do is raise your hand and they will come back into the room.

This routine will be the same every time you come for treatment.

## **Side effects of Radiotherapy**

We plan your radiotherapy treatment so that the dose given to the tumour is maximised without causing damage to surrounding normal but it is not possible to avoid the normal tissues completely.

Please note that any side effects that occur during your treatment will continue and/or may get worse a week or two after your last treatment appointment. Please allow two to four weeks before returning back to your normal routine.

## **Tiredness**

It is quite common to feel more tired than usual while having radiotherapy. Rest if you need to, but try to carry on with all your normal daily activities where possible. Tiredness may continue for some time after your treatment has ended.

Drink plenty of fluids to help relieve fatigue but avoid caffeinated drinks as these will dehydrate you.

## **Hair loss**

In the site of treatment, hair loss is usually an unavoidable side effect of radiotherapy. You may also lose some of your eye lashes if treating near the eyes. This hair loss normally starts around three or four weeks into treatment. The hair loss is usually temporary and will start to grow back approximately two to three months after your treatment has finished.

## **Skin soreness**

During treatment you may find that the skin in the treatment area becomes red, itchy or sore to the touch. After your treatment finishes, the area may become crusty and scab over. This scab will eventually fall off revealing the new skin underneath. This scab formation can occur many times and you may be required to attend for follow-up appointments with specialist radiotherapy nurses to monitor and care for these.

The radiographers and nurses can provide you with cream to use on the treatment area. We will also give you an information leaflet titled “Looking after your skin during radiotherapy” which will outline our skin care advice.

## **Long term side effects**

Careful treatment planning and monitoring helps to limit the occurrence of long-term effects. If they do arise it can be several months or even years after the treatment has finished.

Once healed, the new layers of skin will not be as strong as they used to be, so it is very important to protect the area when in the sun and other extreme temperature conditions such as wind chill and very cold conditions.

You will need to wear SPF50 sun cream on the treatment area in sunny weather for the long term future.

If the treatment area is on your face, it may be useful to wear large sunglasses or a wide brim hat in sunny conditions to ensure protection from the sun.