



Having an immobilisation shell made

This information aims to explain about having a shell made in preparation for your radiotherapy. We hope it will answer the most commonly asked questions, but if anything is unclear, please call us on the number at the bottom of this sheet and we will do our best to help you.

Why do I need a shell?

If you are going to have radiotherapy to your head or neck, we will need to make a shell especially for you, to keep you still, in order to ensure that the treatment is accurate.

What is a shell?

A shell is like a mask, which is made of clear plastic and fits over your face and/or your neck. It will have holes in it around your nose and mouth so that you can breathe, and wherever possible, we will make holes in the shell around your eyes.

When you have your treatment, the shell will fit over you and will be attached to the couch. All the treatment marks will be drawn on the shell rather than on you. Your shell will be kept in the treatment room and you will only wear it for about 10 minutes each time you have your radiotherapy.

There are two methods of making shells. The method used will depend on the type of treatment you require, and this will be decided by your oncologist. See over for further details.

Where can I get further information?

The staff in the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) will be pleased to help you and talk it through. Drop-in or call 01923 844014 for further details.

Method 1 (takes place in the simulator):

How is a shell made?

You will lie on a bed and will be positioned as you would be for treatment. The shell is made by placing a warm, moist plastic sheet over your face and neck. The plastic has holes all over it. You will find it more comfortable to close your eyes, and because of the holes in the plastic, you will be able to breathe normally.

What about my hair?

The shell needs to fit very snugly, so if you plan to have your hair cut, please do so before the impression is made, or wait until your treatment is finished. Similarly, if you have a beard, and you want to have it trimmed, it is best to do this before the impression is made.

How long will it take to make the impression and is it painful?

It is not painful to have an impression made. It will feel warm and wet when the plastic is first placed over your face and neck. While the plastic cools, the radiographers will recheck your treatment position, plan your treatment and begin to draw marks on the shell. This procedure should take no more than 30 minutes.

Will I be alone whilst it's made?

No you won't be alone, a member of staff will be with you throughout the entire procedure.

What happens after the impression has been made?

Once the impression has been made, it will be removed from your face and neck. The shell will have the holes for the eyes. You may be given a further CT or Simulator appointment.

The shell will be used daily for treatment. It may feel tight at first. This is normal, as it is due to the plastic shrinking when it has cooled completely. The tightness will ease after 1 or 2 days of treatment. If it does not, then please tell the radiographers treating you.

Method 2:

How is a shell made?

In order to make your shell, we start by making the 'impression'. We will put a layer of moisturising cream on your skin and protect your hair, by covering it with cling film. We will use plaster of Paris bandages, which we mould to the shape of your head and or neck. The moisturising cream will make it easy for us to remove the plaster once it has set.

What about my hair?

The shell needs to be very snug, so if you plan to have your hair cut, please do so before the impression is made, or wait until your treatment is finished. Similarly, if you have a beard, and if you are wanting to have it trimmed, it is best to do this before the impression is made.

What should I wear when having the impression for my shell made?

It's a good idea to wear an old top that can be slipped off easily, as the plaster used for making the impression can be a bit messy.

How long will it take to make the impression and is it painful?

It is not painful to have an impression made. The plaster takes about 5 minutes to dry, it becomes warm as it dries and stiffens, but this is not uncomfortable. The whole process will take around 20 minutes.

Will I be alone whilst it's made?

No you won't be alone, a member of staff will be with you throughout the entire procedure. If you have brought someone with you, the staff will usually be very happy for them to stay with you in the room whilst your impression is made.

What happens after the impression has been made?

Once the impression has been made, you can go home, and you will be given another appointment (about a week later), when your actual plastic shell will be ready for fitting with the shape of the eyes, nose and mouth cut out. You will be asked whether you would like a shower, so are advised to bring soap / shower gel and towels with you.