

A Patient's Guide to Strontium Therapy at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Consent

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

Identification

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet every time you attend.

Pregnancy/fathering a child

Female patients must not be pregnant or become pregnant and male patients must not father a child during a course of radiotherapy or for some months afterwards. **Please discuss this with your cancer specialist.**

If you think there is a chance, however small, of you or your partner being pregnant during treatment, it is extremely important that you discuss this with your oncologist, radiographer or nurse as soon as possible.

Female Patients will be asked to confirm their pregnancy status prior to radiotherapy. This applies to all women between the ages of 12 - 55 years. This is a legal requirement.

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This leaflet has been written by staff in the Medical Physics (Nuclear Medicine) Department, together with oncologists & health professionals, at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre as well as patients and carers at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

If you have difficulty reading this size of print, a version of this leaflet or any of our leaflets can be produced for you in a larger print.

Introduction

This information is written for patients who are being offered strontium therapy to help reduce their pain. Although it cannot deal with every issue, it aims to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about this treatment.

However, if anything in this leaflet is unclear, please to the contact number on the last page, and the staff will be pleased to help you.

What is Strontium Therapy?

Strontium therapy has been developed to relieve your bone pain caused by the secondary deposits of cancer cells (metastases) in your bones. Strontium is 'chemically' like calcium. It is given by injection into one of your arm veins and it finds its way to all the areas where your bones are absorbing extra calcium. By giving this treatment we are able to target the strontium to all the sites of bone damage throughout your body.

The strontium is radioactive which means that it releases radiation into the site of bone where it is concentrated. The radiation is of a particular form which only penetrates a few millimetres into the bone, and therefore is concentrated at each site and does not result in radiation release outside your body.

In this way we are able to deliver 'radiotherapy' to all the sites of bone damaged by secondary cancer in your body. This is a very effective way of helping your bone pain.

Where is the treatment given?

The treatment is given in the Medical Physics Department, also called Nuclear Medicine, at Mount Vernon Hospital. The entrance that is closest to this department is Gate 1.

The easiest route is through the main entrance of the hospital, turn left and with your back to the main staircase turn left again (staying on the ground floor). Walk to the end of the corridor where you will see the signs to the Medical Physics Department (Nuclear Medicine) on the left.

Alternatively, the door into the corridor to the left of the main entrance provides better access for the disabled. Through this doorway, turn immediately left and follow the signs as before to the Medical Physics Department.

Will I have to sign a consent form?

Yes. As with all medical procedures you will be asked to sign a consent form, which shows you agree to have this treatment. If you are concerned or unclear about any aspects of this treatment, please ask the team treating you to answer your questions before you sign the consent form (see Contacts at the back of this leaflet).

How is treatment given?

You will be treated as an outpatient and the treatment is given by an injection, which is usually into one of the veins in your arm.

How should I prepare for this treatment?

It is advisable to avoid taking calcium supplements for 7 days before the strontium therapy, but apart from that there is usually no need to prepare or make any other changes to your diet before having strontium therapy.

However, be assured that if there are any specific individual instructions you must follow, your doctor will advise you. Please feel free to ask your doctor, if any of this information is unclear.

If you are having any problems with bladder incontinence, (which is when you have no control over passing urine) or if you leak or dribble urine, you must tell the doctor about this before you come for the strontium therapy.

If this does happen to you, please note that the doctor may decide it would be better not to give you the strontium therapy, or may suggest you need to have a catheter passed for a few days after the strontium has been given.

Are there any side-effects from this treatment?

Most patients will not experience any unpleasant side-effects at all. You may eat and drink normally and there is no need to avoid alcohol unless you have already been advised to do so.

There may also be a slight fall in the number of cells in your blood, but this is unlikely to cause any effects which you will notice. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, you should ask the doctor who will be very pleased to explain.

When will I know whether it has worked?

At first, after you have received this treatment, the pain will not feel any different. In fact you may even feel a slight increase in pain during the two or three days after the injection.

Please don't worry, as this is quite normal: you may need to increase your dose of painkillers slightly until it subsides and the doctor (or your Macmillan Nurse) will be able to monitor this or advise you. However, after about two weeks, sometimes a little longer, your pain should begin to ease and then continue to do so for several months.

Will I have to have more than one treatment?

Most people who receive strontium therapy find that the effect lasts for several months at least. If the pain comes back, you should consult your doctor, who may give you another strontium therapy if this is the most appropriate treatment for you.

Will I become radioactive after the treatment?

For a short time after the treatment your blood and urine will be slightly radioactive. Don't worry! The risks to you from the radioactivity are extremely small compared with the benefit you receive from the treatment.

What about my family and other contacts?

At home you will need to take some precautions for a few days, because the radioactivity in your body fluids may be hazardous to other people. For this reason, you should not have sexual intercourse for a week.

As your body fluids will be slightly radioactive, it is also important to take the following precautions for a week following your treatment:

- If a normal toilet is available it should be used in preference to a urinal.
- The toilet should be flushed twice.
- Wipe away any spilled urine with a tissue and flush it away.
- Ensure that you always wash your hands after going to the toilet.
- Immediately wash any linens or clothes which become stained with urine and wash these items separately from other items, rinsing them thoroughly.
- If you should cut yourself, wash away any spilled blood.
- If you have to use any plasters or bandages during the week following your treatment, you should throw them away by placing them in a plastic bag before disposing of them with your normal household rubbish.

Please note they must not be disposed of with clinical waste if you use a clinical waste collection service. In this case you must call us and we will advise you what to do.

Once again we encourage you to ask if you are unclear about any of these instructions (see Contacts at the end of this leaflet).

Information for women: Pregnancy/Breast-feeding

As with all procedures involving radiation, you must not undergo treatment if you are pregnant (or even think you may be pregnant) or if you are breast-feeding.

You must tell the staff if there is any possibility of this being so, and you will be asked to sign a consent form to that effect.

Women of childbearing age who have received strontium treatment are advised not to become pregnant for 24 months following the treatment.

Information for men: Fertility

This kind of treatment might damage the sperm even though it won't prevent the production of it. This damage could cause genetic problems to an unborn child. It is for this reason that we recommend that a man does not father a child for 4 months after receiving strontium treatment.

Please discuss this topic with your hospital doctor or one of the team treating you, so that you are quite clear what this actually means in your case.

Can I change my appointment once it is made?

The answer is 'yes', of course you can change your appointment. However, as the strontium has to be ordered specially for each patient when the appointment is booked, financial loss to the hospital may occur if there is a late cancellation.

We would therefore appreciate it if any unavoidable appointment cancellation or rearrangement could be made at least one week before the appointment is due, so that the order for your dose can be changed accordingly.

Obviously, if there are circumstances which are beyond your control (such as illness) we will understand.

Who should I contact about this treatment?

If you have any questions or concerns at all about this treatment please feel free to contact us.

Medical Physics Department (Nuclear Medicine):

Mon - Fri: 8.30am – 4.30pm 01923 844081

This leaflet forms part of a series of publications produced by the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC).

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The LJMC is staffed by healthcare professionals and trained volunteers and is part of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

- Drop-in centre for support and information
- Telephone Helpline
- Benefits Advice *
- Pre-treatment visits
- Complementary therapies *
- Relaxation classes
- Counselling *
- Support groups
- Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops

* These services are available to patients under the care of an NHS oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

Opening hours: Mon - Fri: 9.30am - 1.00pm & 2.00 - 4.30pm

Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre

situated between the Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)

Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN

Telephone Helpline: **01923 844014**

www.ljmc.org