



Rectal brachytherapy

This leaflet explains what happens when you have brachytherapy to your rectum (back passage). It is a guide to help you understand more about this type of treatment and the procedure involved. The cancer specialist is in charge of your care. In this leaflet they will be referred to as the oncologist. The oncologist in charge of the brachytherapy will see you some time before your treatment, and explain the procedure to you.

You will also have the chance to discuss your treatment beforehand with the brachytherapy radiographers. If you wish, you can see the room where the treatment is given.

You could be seen by both male and/or female radiographers when you have your treatment.

What is brachytherapy

Brachytherapy is a form of radiotherapy given by directly introducing a radiation source into the part of your body we wish to treat. The brachytherapy machine uses a small radioactive source which produces gamma rays.

It may only be necessary to give the treatment on its own, or it may be given in combination with surgery or following a course of radiotherapy.

The oncologist will decide and explain which treatment is best for you.

What does the treatment involve?

Usually you will be treated as an outpatient and the procedure will take about 45 minutes, but the actual treatment will only take between 10 -15 minutes. You will not require a general anaesthetic.

Sometimes it may be necessary to stay on a hospital ward for this treatment, but the oncologist will advise you if this is the case.

You may eat and drink according to your normal diet, both before and after the treatment.

- You will need to lie on your left side or on your back for the treatment to be given. Your oncologist will need to examine your rectum (back passage) before placing a small tube there. The radiographer may do a CT scan to check it is in the correct position.
- As each patient is different, your treatment is worked out especially for you.

- The tube is then attached to the brachytherapy machine by a guide tube. The radioactive source travels along this tube by remote control.
- The staff will leave the room while the treatment is in progress. However, they will be monitoring you on a TV screen in the control area nearby, and will also be able to talk to you via an intercom.
- At the end of the treatment, the radioactive source is withdrawn back into the machine by remote control, and the staff will return to you. The tube is removed and you may then go home. However, we strongly advise you to have a responsible adult to go home with you.

Are there any side-effects?

You may expect to have a discharge and/or slight bleeding from your rectum for a few days after the treatment. Slight bleeding may go on for a longer period. If the symptoms persist you should see your family doctor (GP).

Good hygiene around your rectum is very important. You should take a daily bath where possible, gently washing the area. Sometimes, bathing the area with a mild solution of sodium bicarbonate (half teaspoon to a pint of warm water) may be soothing.

If you have any further questions or problems, please do not hesitate to ask the oncologist, nurse or radiographer.

If you have any queries about the information in this leaflet, please contact the:

Brachytherapy Unit: 020 3826 2629

Radiotherapy Clinic Radiographers: 020 3826 2612 / 2613 or 07825 024058

24 hour Acute Oncology Service
Mount Vernon Cancer Centre: 07825 028855

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 and your hospital name band each time you attend. You must wear your name band at all times whilst in hospital.

If you normally pay for NHS prescriptions

People undergoing treatment for cancer do not have to pay NHS prescription charges if they have a valid medical exemption certificate. To get an exemption certificate, ask your GP for an application form.

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.

Other help and support

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time. If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, including the supportive services offered at the LJMC, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline. The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you and include healthcare professionals and trained volunteers. The centre provides a relaxed setting in which to talk and ask questions. The LJMC is situated between the main Cancer Centre building and Gate 3 (White Hill).

Services offered at the LJMC include:

- ⓪ Drop-in centre
- ⓪ Telephone helpline
- ⓪ Benefits advice*
- ⓪ Complementary therapies*
- ⓪ Relaxation classes
- ⓪ Counselling*
- ⓪ Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- ⓪ The Way Ahead headwear workshops
- ⓪ Self-help courses

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

Mon-Fri: **9.30am-4.30pm**
 Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**
 Website: **www.ljmc.org**

 **Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre**
... supporting people affected by cancer...