

# Radiotherapy for secondary (metastatic) brain tumours

Information for patients at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre (MVCC)

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## Introduction

Your cancer specialist team have recommended that you have a course of radiotherapy.

**This leaflet gives information about having radiotherapy at MVCC and should be read with the Macmillan Cancer Support leaflet on 'Secondary brain tumours'.**

If anything is unclear or you have further questions please contact one of the team treating you. There are contact telephone numbers at the end of this leaflet.

## What is a secondary (metastatic) brain tumour?

The place where a cancer first starts is known as the primary tumour. A secondary tumour happens when cancer cells break away from the primary tumour and travel through the blood system to another part of the body, in this case, the brain. When cancer cells spread to another part of the body they are called secondaries or metastases.

## Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy to the brain may be offered to you, to try to shrink the metastases and improve your symptoms.

Your oncologist may discuss with you a more intensive, specific type of radiotherapy treatment called stereotactic radiotherapy (eg CyberKnife).

## What does radiotherapy involve?

Radiotherapy involves focusing high-energy x-rays on the area of the brain to be treated.

Before starting your radiotherapy you will need to attend the hospital for a planning visit. You could be seen by both male and/or female radiographers when you have your radiotherapy planning and treatment.

You may need to have a shell made for you to wear for your treatment. A shell is like a mask. It is made of a thermoplastic (a type of perforated plastic), and will help to keep your head in position during treatment. This shell is made especially for you, to ensure a comfortable fit. Your cancer specialist team will discuss with you how many treatments you will have. Each treatment session lasts around 5–10 minutes.

## Does the radiotherapy hurt?

This treatment is completely painless. You won't feel any sensation.

## Will I be radioactive after this treatment?

No, you will not be radioactive. It is perfectly safe for you to be with people (including both children and babies) after your treatment.

## Will I have to stay in hospital for this treatment?

No, you will be an outpatient and will be able to go home after each treatment.

## Will this treatment cause side-effects?

The side-effects of radiotherapy to the brain can vary from patient to patient. Here are some of the side-effects that patients having this treatment may experience:

### ○ Skin reaction

Some patients experience a slight skin reaction on the scalp. When washing use a very gentle soap or shampoo.

### ○ Fatigue

Fatigue or excessive tiredness (somnolence) is a very common symptom of radiotherapy to the brain. This can happen during treatment and can last for some months after the course of treatment has finished.

## ○ Headaches and nausea

Sometimes radiotherapy to the brain can cause headaches and nausea. Your oncologist will be able to prescribe medication to help relieve any headaches and prevent you from feeling nauseous.

## ○ Hair loss

Hair loss will occur on the area of the head that has been treated. This hair loss will usually happen two to three weeks after the start of treatment.

### **Will my hair grow back after treatment?**

Hair loss occurs whenever the head receives radiotherapy. Whether your hair will regrow will depend on the dose you are given. If your hair does grow back, it may be finer than before.

### **Can I have a wig?**

Yes, please ask any member of your health care team for details. There is a prescription charge you will need to pay. For further information about wigs and other headwear and to see a selection of scarves and turbans, please visit the Lynda Jackson Centre (LJC).

### **Other side-effects**

This list of side-effects is not complete. Other side-effects may occur when specific parts of the brain are treated. Your oncologist will explain about these if they apply to you.

### **What happens after treatment has finished?**

When your radiotherapy has finished, your dose of steroid medication will be gradually reduced. If you don't feel well on a lower dose of steroids please inform your doctor or specialist nurse as soon as possible. **Do not stop** your steroids suddenly as this can make you feel unwell.

### **Are there any other precautions I should take?**

If you have had, or there is the possibility that you may have a fit or seizure you need to take care when bathing or taking a shower. A shower would be safer, but if you are having a bath keep the water level shallow. If possible try to ensure there is someone with you or near by. Do not lock the bathroom door.

You should avoid swimming if you are at risk of having a fit or seizure. If you do swim you must make the lifeguard aware.

### **Is it okay for me to drive?**

No. Once you have been diagnosed with brain metastasis you must not drive. The **law requires you** to inform the Drivers and Vehicle Licensing Association (DVLA) of your diagnosis. Depending on the grade of the tumour, the DVLA will not allow you to drive for two years.

Please be aware that if you drive when a doctor has advised you not to, your insurance will be invalidated, and you may be prosecuted.

It is your responsibility. You can contact the DVLA by calling 0300 790 6806 or at [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk)

### **Additional help and support**

The Lynda Jackson Centre provides additional support and information for patients and carers on any issue associated with the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The centre offers a range of services including counselling, complementary therapies and relaxation sessions. Please feel free to drop in or call us on the number below.

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| <b>Contacts</b> | Radiotherapy clinic radiographers (Mon–Fri: 9.00am–5.00pm) .....     | 020 3826 2612 |
|                 | Radiotherapy bookings answerphone .....                              | 020 3826 2446 |
|                 | Contact Centre Hub (general enquiries and appointment queries) ..... | 0333 332 5470 |
|                 | Lynda Jackson Centre .....   | 020 3826 2555 |

**24 Hour Acute Oncology Service, Mount Vernon Cancer Centre: 07825 028855**