

Palliative Radiotherapy for Brain Metastases

Information for patients

Your clinician has advised you to have a course of radiotherapy treatment to manage your symptoms. This leaflet explains what the treatment involves.

What are brain metastases?

Brain metastases are deposits of cancer cells that have spread from the primary cancer into the brain. Symptoms may include headache, nausea and vomiting, unsteadiness of the arms or legs, difficulty speaking, or seizures.

What will radiotherapy do?

The aim of radiotherapy is to:

- relieve symptoms by shrinking cancer cells within the brain
- allow you to reduce your dose of steroids without your symptoms returning.

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy uses high energy X-rays to destroy cancer cells while doing as little harm as possible to normal cells. The treatment is painless and you will not see or feel anything whilst the treatment is being delivered. Radiotherapy to the brain is usually given in 5 or 10 treatments. Your doctor will let you know how many is appropriate for you.

What can I do to prepare for my appointment?

You may be in the department for up to 3 hours, so:

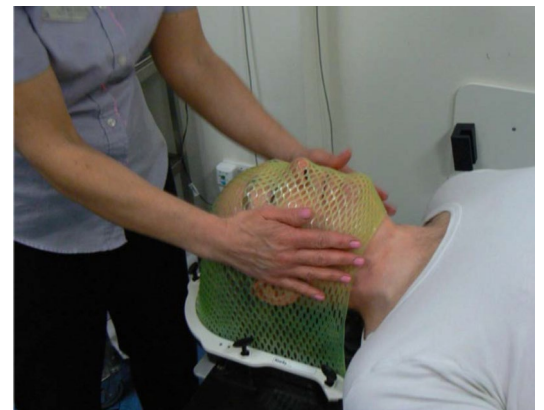
- **bring regular medications including painkillers**
- bring a snack or money for the café.

What happens in the radiotherapy department?

Treatment planning

The first step is to make a mask of your head. This takes around 20 minutes. It makes sure your head is still and in the same position each day during treatment. It also allows the radiographers to draw marks on to it to indicate the area to be treated.

A plastic sheet is warmed in a water bath and placed over your face. It hardens to fit. Then you will have a radiotherapy planning scan on a CT scanner. You will be asked to lie on a couch wearing the mask and the radiographers and your doctor will take the measurements required to plan your treatment.



Making the mask

Treatment delivery

For the treatment, you will be asked to lie on the treatment couch in the same position you were in for the planning scan. The radiographers will leave the room while the radiotherapy is delivered, but they can see you on CCTV. You will be asked to lie still while the treatment machine moves around you and delivers x-rays. It will take a few minutes.

Occasionally, treatment starts the same day as the scan. If so, there will be a wait of up to 3 hours while we calculate and check your radiotherapy plan. Otherwise, your treatment will start within a few days as detailed on your appointment letter.



What are the side-effects of radiotherapy?

- Radiotherapy to the brain will make your hair fall out. This begins 2-3 weeks after treatment starts. The hair will re-grow but may take some months to do so. The nursing staff will arrange for you to have a wig if you wish.
- Your scalp may become itchy during your radiotherapy. Wash with simple, unperfumed shampoo. Do not put on any other product. Staff will advise on cream to help.
- You may already be taking steroid tablets prescribed by your doctor. If so, it is important that you continue to take them during your radiotherapy.
- It is important to report any headaches or nausea that you experience during your course of treatment, as these can be side-effects of the treatment and may require adjustments to your medications.
- You may feel more tired for a few weeks after your radiotherapy.
- Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive. You do not have to restrict contact with children or pregnant women.

What happens next?

It may be several weeks before you feel the full effect of the radiotherapy. During this time you should continue to take any medication as prescribed. Most patients are seen in clinic 4-6 weeks after completing radiotherapy to assess the response to treatment. In the meantime you will be given advice about slowly reducing your steroid. During this time you should report any concerns about your symptoms to the Cancer Treatment Helpline.

Contact details

If you have any further queries about your treatment, please contact your Clinical Nurse Specialist.

Cancer Treatment Helpline

If you have any problems during your treatment, or up to 8 weeks after, you can call the Cancer Treatment Helpline on **0800 9217 7711**. This is a 24 hour service.

Patient Transport

Booking-line: 03000 13 4000 (option1, option1)

