

Having radiotherapy to your whole or partial brain

Your doctor has recommended that you have a course of radiotherapy to your brain. The aim of giving this treatment is to improve symptoms caused by brain metastases (secondaries).

This factsheet provides information about your radiotherapy treatment so that you know what the treatment involves and the possible side effects. We will ask you to sign a consent form that confirms that you wish to receive this treatment. You can change your mind at any time about receiving treatment.

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is a type of anti-cancer treatment using x-rays. The treatment is given using a machine called a linear accelerator. You cannot feel treatment delivery. It takes approximately 10-20 minutes to deliver the treatment.

How does radiotherapy work?

Radiation damages cells - healthy, normal cells can repair themselves, whilst it is hoped that the abnormal cancer cells cannot recover.

Planning your radiotherapy treatment (pre-treatment)

Before starting the radiotherapy we will need to make a radiotherapy shell (mask) for your head. Please see the factsheet *Having a shell (or mask) made for radiotherapy* which explains how this is done.

We will take a CT scan while you are wearing the shell so that we can plan the treatment. Please see the factsheet *Having radiotherapy CT planning* for further information about your scan. The treatment will be planned specifically for you, to make sure that the area is targeted with the least amount of normal tissues included.

The CT planning session will usually take about 30 minutes. After your planning session, a time and date to start the radiotherapy treatment will be confirmed. Your treatment start date will be the earliest time that we can get the treatment ready.

Radiotherapy treatment

You will need to report to the receptionist in the Radiotherapy Department every day when you arrive. The receptionist will let the radiographers working on your machine know that you have arrived. On your first visit the radiographers will set aside some time to talk you through the treatment and answer any extra questions you may have, so please arrive 20 minutes before your treatment time on that day.



You will usually be given radiotherapy treatment every day, Monday to Friday. A course of treatment lasts between two and 10 treatments. Your doctor will have discussed the number and scheduling of your treatments when you were seen in clinic.

At each visit, the radiographers will take you into the treatment room and position you on the treatment couch with your shell, as you were for the planning scan. The staff will leave the room to deliver the treatment. You will be alone in the room for a few minutes while the radiotherapy machine is switched on. The radiographers can see and hear you; so if you have any problems, you can call out or raise your hand for attention and they will interrupt the treatment to come in to help you. Some treatment machines have background music playing to help you feel more comfortable.

The radiotherapy machine will move around you but it will not touch you. Although you can hear a buzzing noise when the treatment is being delivered, you will not be able to feel anything happening. Please see our policy on monitoring in radiotherapy in The Royal Marsden booklet *Radiotherapy; your questions answered*.

Care during your course of treatment

The radiographers who you see each day can give you advice if you have any problems. They can also contact someone from the Radiotherapy team to come and see you for specialist advice.

Side effects of radiotherapy

Side effects can occur during or after the treatment, such as:

- **Skin reaction:** the skin in the treatment area may become pink, or if you have more pigmented skin, it may become darker. It may also feel dry and itchy - this is common. You can use a light moisturiser on the skin in the treatment area to soothe this. Avoid using very thick or medicated creams. We will give you more skin care information when you start your treatment.
- **Hair loss:** this only affects hair in the treatment area and it will usually grow back a few months after radiotherapy has finished.
- **Fatigue (tiredness):** this side effect is common. The tiredness may continue for several weeks or even months after completion of treatment.
- **Worsening of original symptoms:** this may mean that you have a worse headache, ongoing visual or hearing disturbance or fits. This would improve within a week or two.
- **Short term memory loss:** after radiotherapy to the brain, you may find that your short-term memory is not as good as it was before treatment. This can be an ongoing side effect.

Follow up after your treatment

Your clinical team will arrange how you will be followed up after completion of your treatment.

Please note that some, but not all, people with brain metastases are prescribed steroids. It is important that you always take steroids exactly as directed and only stop taking them by reducing the dose according to the instructions.



Contact details

Please make sure you ask any questions you need to and that you understand what you have been told. If you would like any explanation repeated, the radiotherapy team is happy to do so – there is a great deal of information to take in during one session.

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment, you can contact the switchboard: 020 7352 8171 and ask for your consultant's secretary (Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm).

Your Radiotherapy Consultant is _____

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

If you need to change your radiotherapy appointments, please phone:

The radiotherapy bookings team: 020 8915 6018
(Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm)

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Driving and DVLA regulations

If you have been diagnosed with brain metastases, you are required by law to inform the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) of your diagnosis and you must stop driving (any motor vehicle) until the DVLA inform you otherwise. You could be fined up to £1,000 if you do not tell DVLA about a condition that might affect your ability to drive safely. You could also be prosecuted if you have an accident.

It is a good idea to surrender (give up) your driving licence and send it to the DVLA at the same time as you inform them of your diagnosis.

You can phone, email or write to the DVLA. They will require the following information: Full name; date of birth; driving licence number; the type of cancer that you have and the date of your diagnosis; brief details of any surgery or other treatment that you have had with dates; the name and address of your GP and your oncologist.

If the DVLA require more information than you can provide, they will ask your permission to contact your doctor. Once the DVLA have all the information they require, they will let you know how long it will be before you can apply to drive again.

How to contact the DVLA for medical enquiries

Telephone: 0300 790 6806
(Monday to Friday, 8am–5:30pm, Saturday, 8am–1pm)

