

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is used alongside chemotherapy and surgery as one of the three main treatments for childhood cancer. It will not make you radioactive so it is safe to be around people during treatment.

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy rays that can destroy tumour cells at a greater rate than healthy cells.

Radiotherapy treatment is planned individually, and may be given daily, Monday to Friday, over several weeks.

Radiotherapy is given at University College Hospital (UCH) in London. You will be given a booklet by the radiotherapy department: 'Having radiotherapy at UCH: Information for Southampton families.'

Preparation for radiotherapy

Your child will be referred to either Dr Yen Chang, Dr Jenny Gains or Dr Mark Gaze, who specialise in treating children and teenagers with radiotherapy.

Their first appointment at UCH will be in clinic in the radiotherapy department.

Your child may require a mask or body mould to be made to enable them to lie in exactly the same position for each of their radiotherapy treatments. The play team will help to prepare your child for this.

X-rays and measurements are taken in the planning procedure to ensure the radiotherapy is given in the right place.

Radiotherapy treatment

Specially trained radiotherapy doctors plan and give the radiotherapy treatment. This can take from a few seconds to several minutes.

Radiotherapy treatment is painless. Your child will be asked to keep still and breathe normally.

Common side effects of radiotherapy

Side effects will vary depending on the area of the body being treated. Most side effects are localised to the treatment site, and may include:

- Itchy and sore skin
- Tiredness
- Nausea and vomiting (more common if the head or stomach is receiving the radiotherapy)
- Lowered blood count.

Skin care

- Wash the area gently using warm water and unscented soap.
- Do not use bubble bath, talc, creams or deodorants on the treatment area.
- Hair washing for people receiving radiotherapy to the head is advised but an unmedicated shampoo should be used, and washing should be gentle with warm water. Allow hair to dry naturally rather than rubbing dry.
- Use a moisturiser that does not contain laurel sulphates, such as Zerobase cream.
- Wear loose clothing to avoid rubbing the skin at the treatment area.
- Whilst out in the sun, always wear a hat and ensure the area receiving radiotherapy is covered with clothing.

Somnolence

Children receiving radiotherapy to the head may experience extreme sleepiness (somnolence) up to four to twelve weeks after completing treatment. This can last for between two and eight weeks.

Sometimes children are so drowsy, they may not wish to eat or drink. If this is the case, they may need admission to hospital for nasogastric (NG) feeding with a tube or IV fluids.

After radiotherapy treatment

The side effects of radiotherapy can continue for several weeks after treatment has finished. Your child will be followed up by their consultant here in Southampton.

Useful contact numbers

Radiotherapy reception

Direct telephone: **020 3447 3700 / 020 3447 3701**

Radiotherapy play specialists

Direct telephone: **020 3447 3792**

Paediatric specialist radiographer

Direct telephone: **020 3447 3711**