

# 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.

## Preparation for radiotherapy

The consultant from the radiotherapy department will meet with you to discuss your child's treatment and any potential side effects they may have.

The play leader from the ward will work with you and your child to prepare them for radiotherapy, which will include a pre treatment visit to 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 leader from the ward will help to prepare your child for this.

In the planning procedure x-rays and measurements are taken 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.

During the radiotherapy you will be able to watch your child on a television screen and talk to them via an intercom. There is also a CD player in the radiotherapy room so your child can bring music with them to listen to if they wish.

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 unscented baby shampoo should be used, and washing should be gentle with warm water. Allow hair to dry naturally rather than rubbing dry.
- Use the aqueous cream supplied by the radiographers sparingly and gently, applying to the treatment area once a day to keep the skin moisturised.
- 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 the radiotherapy consultant and on Piam Brown ward.

## Paediatric radiographer

The paediatric radiographer is available for advice and to assist you. They are based in the radiotherapy department, Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm via radiotherapy reception on 023 8120 8568.