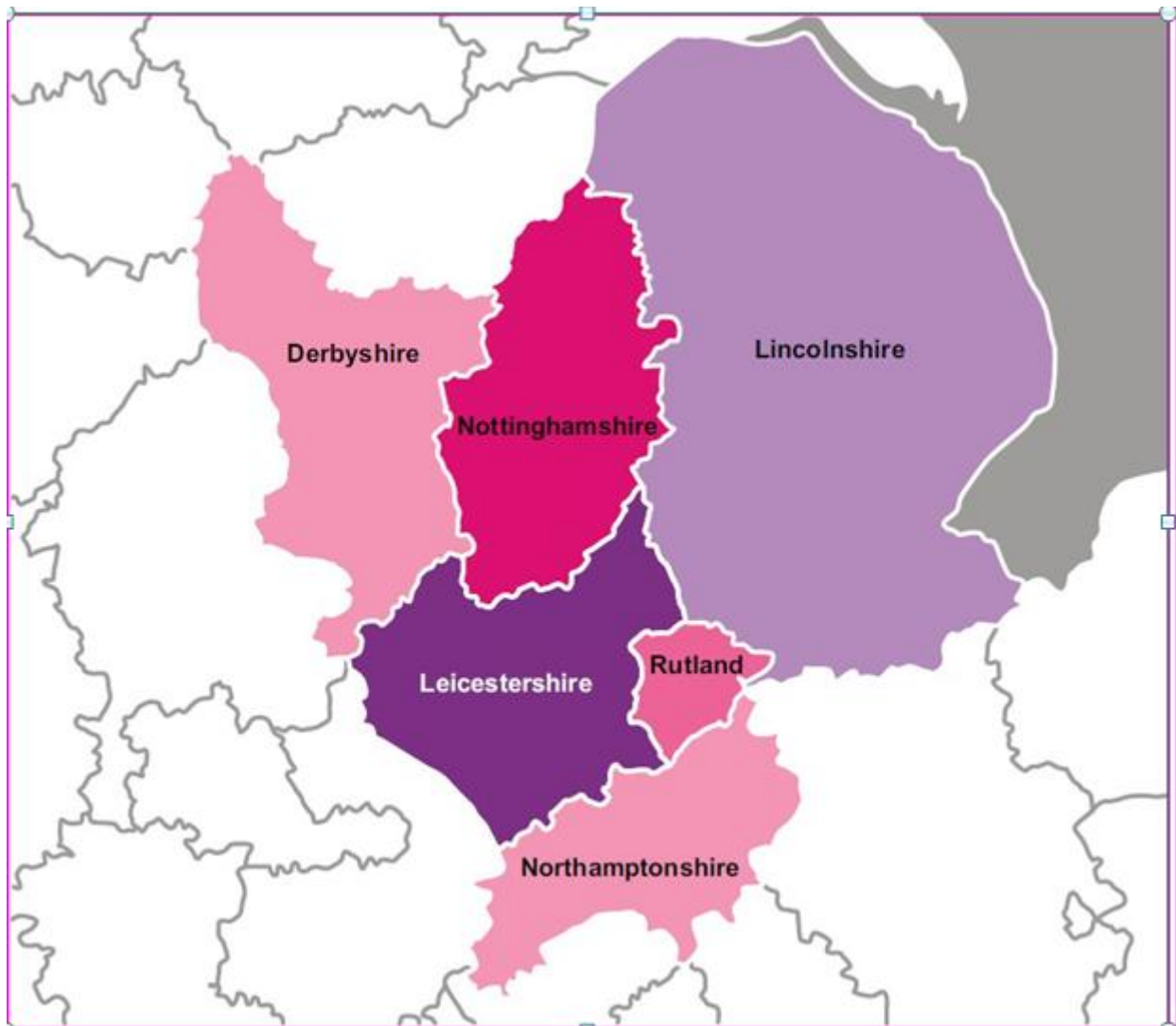


Radiotherapy for soft tissue sarcomas

Department
Information for Patients

Produced: Sept 2026
Review: Sept 2029
Leaflet number: 758 Version: 6



East Midlands
Sarcoma Service

Introduction

Radiotherapy (sometimes called X-ray therapy) is the use of high energy radiation to kill cancer cells in the body. It can also be used to reduce some of the symptoms caused by cancer.

Radiotherapy is used to treat sarcomas in several ways. You may have radiotherapy:

- to shrink the sarcoma before surgery
- after surgery to help stop the sarcoma coming back
- to help control or reduce symptoms from an advanced sarcoma.

Occasionally radiotherapy may be used on its own in an attempt to control the sarcoma.

Radiotherapy for soft tissue sarcomas is given daily from Monday to Friday. The number of treatments is dependent on the type of tumour and its size and position within the body.

It is important that we get you in the correct position for radiotherapy. For radiotherapy to the arms or legs a special cushion called a “vac bag” may be made especially to fit you.

When your consultant talked to you about the treatment options available, the side effects of radiotherapy will have been explained. They are often discussed in terms of **early** side effects and **late** side effects.

Early side effects

The side effects that you experience will depend on the area of the body being treated. The doctor or radiographer will explain the side effects that you may experience. Please feel free to ask any questions.

You will **not** be radioactive after the radiotherapy and it is safe for you to be in contact with other people including children.

Tiredness

You may feel tired. This may be related to your illness or your treatment. There is no need to alter your lifestyle radically, but be sensible and rest if you feel you need to.

Skin changes

During radiotherapy, the skin in the treatment area is exposed to radiation. The effect is similar to expose to the sun. As treatment progresses, the skin may redden and be drier than normal. Rarely, moist patches form in the area being treated.

Advice:

If you have a wound that has not completely healed following your surgery, you will be given advice by the radiographers.

We recommend that you apply a moisturising cream to the area.

- Use the cream twice daily from the start of treatment. If the skin breaks and forms moist patches, stop using the cream and ask your radiographer for advice.
- Take care when washing, keeping the water warm rather than hot.
- If possible, use baby or simple soap, do not use shower creams or bubble bath in your water.

- Pat the area dry with a soft towel, being particularly careful with folds of skin and taking care not to rub.
- Avoid wearing tight clothes over the area being treated.
- Do not swim if you have visibly red or moist skin.
- Do not use a sunbed.

Towards the end of treatment you may see the radiotherapy nurses at each visit, to assist you with skin care. At the end of your course of treatment, the radiotherapy nurses will arrange further skin care as necessary.

The skin reaction can worsen, even though you have finished treatment. If your skin becomes moist stop using the moisturising cream and contact your radiotherapy team.

You should wait for approximately three to four weeks after you complete your course of treatment before you go back to your normal washing routine.

Once your skin has settled, be careful with the treated area in the sunshine. The skin may be more sensitive and we recommend you use a minimum of factor 30 sunscreen.

Swelling

If you are having an arm or leg treated this may swell during or after treatment. If this happens, try to keep the limb raised when you are sitting down.

Hair loss

Hair will only fall out in the area being treated by radiotherapy. The hair that is lost may grow back after the treatment has been completed, but it is often lost permanently.

Feeling sick

Depending on the area of the body being treated, you may feel sick. In some cases your doctor will prescribe drugs for you to take about 30 minutes to an hour before you have your treatment. This will reduce the chances of you suffering from sickness or nausea. If you have been prescribed medication to stop you being sick and it does not work, please let your radiographer know.

Advice:

You can also help yourself by:

- Trying to eat small, regular meals.
- Trying to drink plenty of fluids, especially if you do not feel like eating.
- Asking us for anti-sickness medication.

Effects on your bowel

- You may experience an increase in the number of times you open your bowels.
- You may find that you have diarrhoea, or your tummy may feel bloated and tender. Please inform the radiographers if this occurs.

Advice:

- If you normally take laxatives, please inform the radiographers.
- Eat a normal well-balanced diet.

We can prescribe medication for diarrhoea if necessary.

Effects on the bladder

- You may experience a burning on passing urine.
- You may pass water more frequently.
- You may need to pass urine urgently.

Advice:

- You should increase your fluid intake to between two or three litres a day, from the start of your treatment. Alcohol, tea and coffee may irritate the bladder, so these should be drunk in moderation.
- We recommend a glass of cranberry juice each day, which is a natural remedy for keeping urinary tract infections at bay.

Please note that if you are taking warfarin, you should not drink cranberry juice.

All of these side effects should disappear gradually once you have completed your course of treatment.

Late side effects

Late effects of radiotherapy occur after you have completed your course of treatment. Your doctor will advise you of the long term side effects, as they will be dependent on the part of the body being treated. They may include the following:

Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is swelling due to the lymph glands and vessels being damaged by the radiotherapy. The lymph fluid is then unable to pass through the vessels, and this build up can cause swelling.

Arthritis

If you have had radiotherapy to one of your joints, it may become stiff. It is important to undertake regular exercise to keep the joint mobile. Your doctor may recommend a course of physiotherapy for you.

Skin changes

The skin and underlying fat in the area where you have had radiotherapy will look slightly different, and it may feel harder than it did before radiotherapy. This is called fibrosis.

Infertility

People who have had radiotherapy to their pelvic area may become infertile (unable to have children). This is due to the effects on the testes, ovaries or womb. If this is relevant to you, your doctor will discuss this with you.

Cancer

A very small number of people develop a second cancer many years after they have been cured of their sarcoma.

Please remember that all sarcoma patients are different, and not all of these side effects will necessarily apply to you.

Research trials

We are keen to improve radiotherapy treatments for sarcoma patients, and your doctor may talk to you about a trial looking at new radiotherapy treatments. You are under no pressure to be involved in trials.

Follow-up

You will be reviewed regularly while you are on treatment . After treatment has been completed, you will be given an appointment to see the doctor in about four weeks, or sooner if necessary.

Useful contacts

Please contact your sarcoma nurse specialist or radiotherapy department if you have any concerns or questions.

Macmillan Information and Support Centre, Leicester

Telephone: 0116 258 6189

Email: uhl-tr.cancerinformationcentre@nhs.net

Macmillan Information and Support Centre, Derby

Telephone: 01332 786 008

Macmillan Information and Support Centre, Nottingham

Telephone: 0115 840 2650

Macmillan Information and Support Centre, Northampton

Telephone: 01604 544 211

Macmillan Information and Support Centre, Lincoln

Telephone: 01522 573799

Further information

Cancer Research UK

Telephone:

0808 800 4040

Website:

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Macmillan Cancer Support

Telephone:

0808 808 00 00

Website:

www.macmillan.org.uk

Sarcoma UK

Support Line:

0808 801 0401

Website:

www.sarcoma.org.uk

With thanks to the Radiotherapy Department, University Hospitals of Leicester for allowing us to use their information in producing this booklet.

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.

To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
 ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।
 إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل
 Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu
 જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો.

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net

We are a research hospital and you may be asked to take part in research