



**Barwon  
Health**

**ABDOMEN  
TREATMENT  
INFORMATION  
BOOKLET**

**Department of Radiation Oncology**  
Cancer Services, University Hospital Geelong

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*Below: The Andrew Love Cancer Centre located at University Hospital Geelong (Swanston Street entrance). Open 8am - 5pm.*

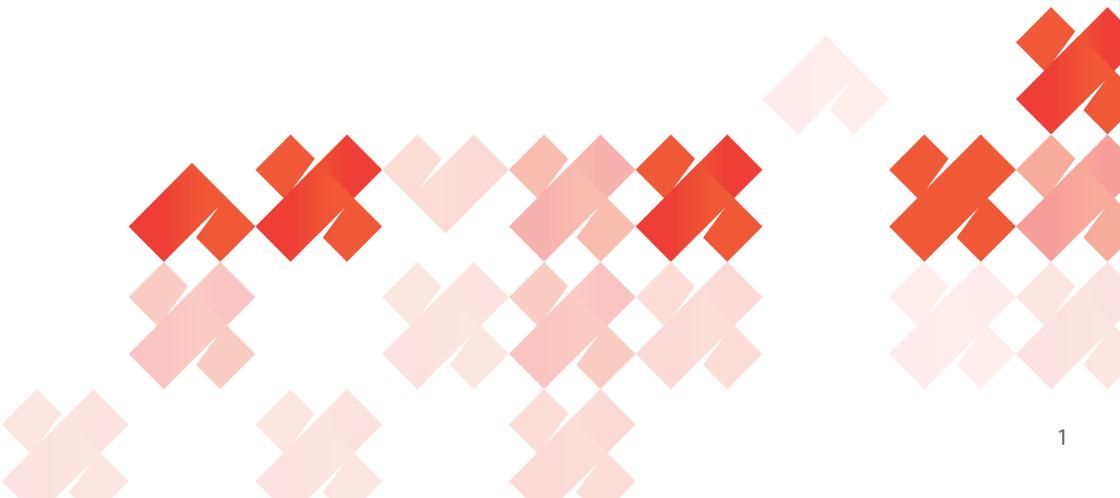


## WHAT IS RADIOTHERAPY?

Radiotherapy is the use of radiation to destroy cancer cells. It works because cancer cells are more sensitive to radiation than normal cells. If a small dose of radiation is given each day over several weeks, normal cells recover from radiation but cancer cells cannot.

Radiotherapy is often given to patients who have cancers that arise in the abdomen (primary cancers) or have spread to the abdominal region (metastases). Radiotherapy can be used with the aim to cure a cancer or it may be given with the aim to relieve symptoms.

Radiotherapy can be used in conjunction with other types of treatment; for example, surgery or chemotherapy or a combination of all of these.



## WHAT IS THE PROCESS?

During a consultation with your radiation oncologist (doctor) at the Andrew Love Cancer Centre (ALCC) your treatment options will be discussed and a decision made to proceed with treatment.

Before your radiotherapy treatment can begin, the area to be treated needs to be defined. This occurs during a planning session. We will contact you by phone to advise you of the booking we have made for your planning session.

At the planning session a radiation therapist will take a CT scan of the area indicated by your radiation oncologist to help plan your treatment. Measurements will be taken and tiny permanent marks will be made on your skin. An IV Contrast may be requested for this scan. If so, a blood test request and further information will be given to you.

At your planning session a radiotherapy nurse will spend time with you to discuss skin care and answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Also at the planning visit you will be given an appointment time to commence your radiotherapy. There are limited appointment times for the first visit so options may seem restricted however, your remaining appointment times will be discussed with you on your first treatment day and booked at times that best suit your needs, depending on availability.

On the day of your first treatment, please check in with your appointment card at our reception desk and take a seat in the waiting room. A radiation therapist will meet with you and discuss the procedure about to take place prior to taking you through to the treatment area. Once in the treatment room, you will be placed in the same position as you were for the planning session and treatment will be delivered.

You will be in the treatment room for up to 10-15 minutes each visit and the treatment may last for approximately 30 seconds to one minute from several different angles.

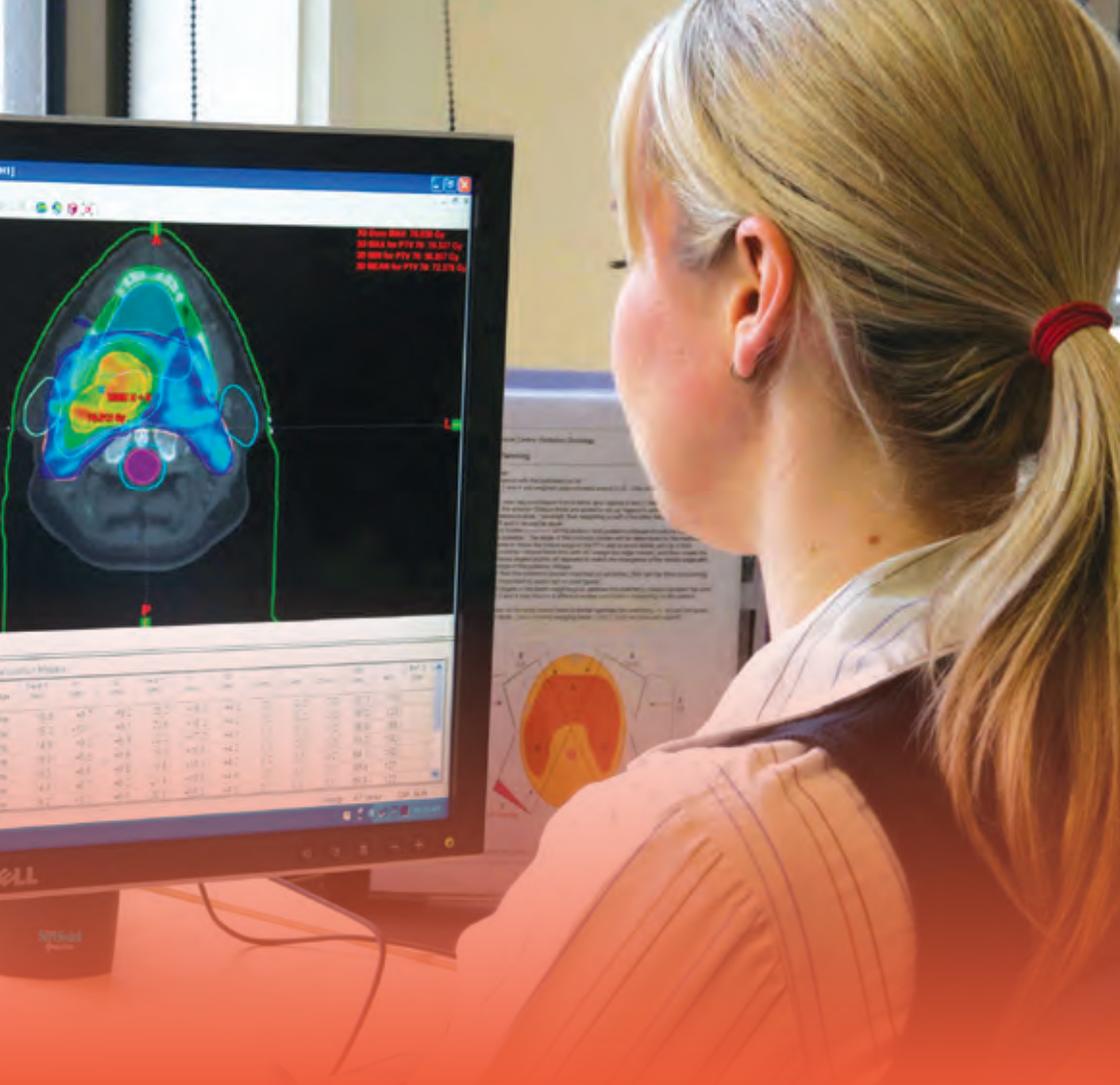
When you arrive each subsequent day for treatment, please hand your appointment booklet to the receptionists at the front desk and take a seat in the waiting room. You will then be invited through to the treatment area by one of the radiation therapists.

Whilst receiving radiotherapy, a doctor will see you once each week in the treatment department. Nursing staff are also on hand to assist with any problems related to your treatment. The time spent in the Centre may be as much as one hour each day, depending on daily waiting times and your need to see a doctor or one of the nurses.

You may see the oncology dietician in your first week of treatment to discuss your dietary intake. Further visits will be arranged at that time. It is encouraged that you do not lose weight during your treatment course.

*Below: The Linear Accelerator – used to deliver your treatment.*





We encourage your family to watch one of your treatments, so there is better understanding of the daily activity

## **WILL I FEEL ANYTHING?**

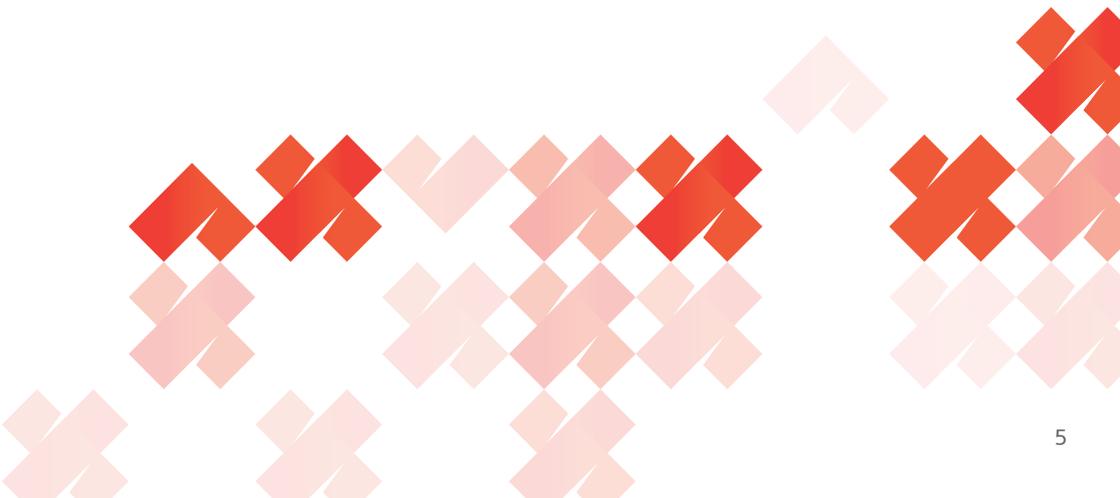
You will feel no discomfort whilst treatment is taking place. The machine makes a noise but you feel and see nothing. Once you are positioned the radiation therapists will leave the room and program the machine and computers.

You will be monitored on closed circuit television and there are microphones for communication if necessary. We encourage your family to watch one of your treatments, so there is better understanding of the daily activity.

Note: you are not radioactive whilst having radiotherapy and it is safe to be near children and pregnant women.

## **HOW WILL IT AFFECT MY DAILY LIVING?**

You may continue your usual work and activities but you may experience some tiredness near the end of your course of treatment and in the weeks following.



## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE-EFFECTS?

You may experience different degrees of these reactions, depending on the treatment site, the dose being given, the number of treatments, and your general health. Reactions usually begin to occur within the second or third week of treatment.

### **Skin reddening and irritation**

Slight reddening can occur by the second or third week of treatment and usually settles two weeks after your radiotherapy has finished. See page 8 for skin care instructions

### **Fatigue**

You may become increasingly tired as you near the end of your treatment. This is a normal reaction to the radiotherapy and each person is affected in varying degrees. Finding a balance between rest and activity will help you cope with this side-effect.

### **Nausea/vomiting**

There are many things which may produce feelings of fullness and nausea, or which may cause vomiting. Sometimes radiotherapy and chemotherapy have this effect. Other factors such as anxiety or emotional stress can also be the cause. During periods when nausea is a problem, small light meals are usually best. Once you feel better it is important to eat again to help make up for the nourishment missed.

If nausea is a problem, please tell the radiotherapy nurse or doctor. If vomiting develops, or is likely to develop, your doctor may advise medication to be taken each day before treatment.

## **Lack of appetite**

This is a common side-effect and may be due to a number of reasons. You may eat less because you just do not feel hungry, food may taste different, you may have problems with nausea, you may have difficulty eating, you may be depressed, or you may be less active than usual. Although your appetite is depressed, it is important to realise that your body still requires food.

Weight loss results from an inadequate energy intake from food and therefore you should look at ways of increasing your food intake. The oncology dietician will discuss food and nutrition with you at length.

## **Bowel Irritation**

There is usually bowel within the treatment fields, and you may develop loose bowel motions or diarrhoea two to three weeks after treatment.

Please report abnormal bowel motions or diarrhoea to the radiotherapy nurses, as severity needs to be monitored and appropriate medication may be prescribed. Making changes to your diet may be beneficial in helping ease this side-effect and the oncology dietician will guide you with any changes.

## HOW CAN I MANAGE MY SKIN WHILE ON TREATMENT?

Radiation can cause skin irritations to the treated area, but fortunately in treatment of the abdomen, skin irritations are unlikely to be a major problem. The following suggestions are helpful for the care of skin exposed to radiation:

### **During radiotherapy**

- A skin moisturiser will be given to you for use during treatment. At the start of treatment you are to apply the cream to the skin in the treatment area TWICE DAILY but as your treatment progresses you may need to apply the cream three to four times per day.
- You may wash the treated skin with warm water and mild, unperfumed soap. Pat skin dry – do not rub.
- Do not use talcum powder.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes. Loose cotton t-shirts or singlets are best.
- Avoid exposing the treated skin to excessive temperatures including direct sunlight, heat packs, ice packs, electric blankets, saunas or hot spas during the course of your radiotherapy.

## COMMON QUESTIONS

### **Can I wash the marks off of my skin?**

We ask that you don't deliberately wash them off as this may irritate your skin. The radiation therapists will re-apply them each day as required if they wear off.

### **What happens after my treatment is finished?**

Your follow up arrangements will be discussed and organised by your treating doctor prior to completing your treatment.

### **When do the side-effects settle?**

The treatment keeps on working even though you have stopped coming in for treatment. Therefore you might find that symptoms get a little worse before they get better. Generally the side-effects will have settled within two to three weeks of finishing your treatment course.

## REMEMBER

Experienced staff members are available to help you. The team in the radiotherapy unit consists of doctors, radiation therapists, nurse specialists, social workers, dieticians and pastoral care workers – they are here to help you resolve any concerns or problems you may have.

Please do not hesitate to ask for help. Contact details can be found on the back of this booklet.

## PHONE CONTACTS

Radiotherapy Department Reception  
03 4215 2600 (General Enquiries)

Radiotherapy Nurses' Desk  
03 4215 2603

[www.barwonhealth.org.au/cancer-services](http://www.barwonhealth.org.au/cancer-services)

