



**Barwon
Health**

BREAST 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.*



WHAT IS RADIOTHERAPY?

Radiotherapy is the use of radiation to destroy cancer cells.

It works because some 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 given to the breast or chest wall to reduce the chance of cancer returning to that area after surgery and/or chemotherapy.

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 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. You will then have tiny permanent marks placed on your skin. Also at the planning visit you will be given an appointment time to commence your radiotherapy. There are limited appointment times for the first treatment 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.

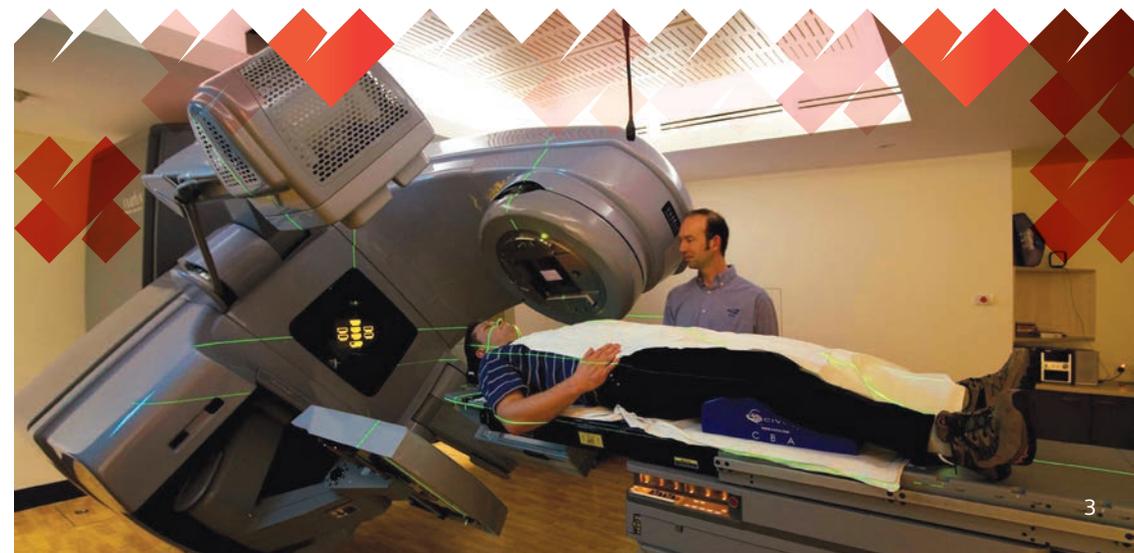
Following the planning session the radiotherapy nurse will meet with you to discuss skin care during treatment and to address any needs or concerns that you may have regarding treatment.

During a consultation with your radiation oncologist at ALCC, your treatment options will be discussed and a decision made to proceed with treatment.

On the day of your first treatment, report in with your appointment card to the 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 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 from each of 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 a radiation therapy staff member. Whilst attending for a course of 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.

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



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 will 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 7 for suggestions on dealing with this side-effect.

Skin blistering

You may experience some skin blistering in the axilla (armpit), under the breast, the nipple or the neck area (if your supraclavicular nodes are being treated) as these areas are susceptible to friction. This may occur in the fourth week of treatment and require a simple dressing until the area heals approximately two weeks after treatment is completed.

Fatigue

You may become tired as you get towards 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.

Aches and pains in the breast

You may feel minor twinges or pain in the breast, this discomfort is not uncommon and will subside once treatment is completed.

HOW CAN I MANAGE MY SKIN WHILE ON TREATMENT?

- You will be given a skin moisturiser for use during treatment. At the start of treatment you are to apply the cream TWICE DAILY, but as treatment progresses you may need to apply the cream three to four times per day. If any part of your skin becomes 'itchy', inform the nurses as you may need to use a different cream in the 'itchy' area.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothing that could potentially rub or irritate your skin, you may find singlets, cotton "crop-tops" or old loose fitting cotton bras more comfortable.
- Avoid exposure of the treatment area to excessive temperatures, such as: direct sunlight, heat packs, ice packs, electric blanket, saunas or hot spas and chlorinated pools during the course of your radiotherapy.
- You may wash the skin that is being treated with warm water and a mild unperfumed soap such as Velvet, baby soap or Dove unscented. Pat the skin dry – don't rub.
- Do not shave or use any deodorants under the arm on the side being treated.

AFTER TREATMENT

When all side-effects from the radiotherapy have settled (usually within two to three weeks after treatment is finished), you can resume your normal skin care routine. You may use the lotions, creams, soaps and deodorants that you used before your therapy started.

Skin discomfort and sensitivity

the skin in the treated breast will begin to settle down over the two weeks after treatment, in this time though it may become tender or sore and you may need to take some pain medication for this period of time.

Increased firmness

mild to moderate firmness can occur in the treated breast, which can persist for six to eight weeks post treatment but requires no intervention.

Swelling of the treated breast

mild swelling may persist for up to one year or more and doesn't pose too much of a problem, but moderate swelling can persist six to eight weeks after treatment and be quite uncomfortable. The radiotherapy nurse can advise on massage techniques to reduce the swelling and therefore the discomfort.

RARE REACTIONS AFTER YOUR COURSE OF TREATMENT

Lung inflammation and scarring

Your breast is in front of your chest wall and lungs so a small volume of lung must be included for treatment to include the whole breast. About one to three in every 100 women treated experiences lung inflammation between six weeks and six months after radiotherapy has finished. The symptoms may include excessive tiredness, fever, shortness of breath or a cough. If you have these symptoms, your doctor may arrange an x-ray of your chest and may prescribe a course of steroid tablets.

Rib fractures

One to three in every 100 women treated experiences a fracture in the treated area from six to twelve months after the course of treatment. You may feel a sharp pain along the rib cage in the treated area and your doctor may ask for an x-ray to determine if your rib is broken. You may need some pain medication but no other special treatment is necessary.

REMEMBER

Experienced staff members are available to help you. The team in the radiotherapy unit consists of doctors, nurse specialists, radiation therapists, 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 brochure.

USEFUL RESOURCES

www.breastcancer.org
www.nbcf.org.au
www.bcna.org.au
www.nswcc.org.au
www.jeanhailes.org.au
www.bci.org.au
www.nbcc.org.au
www.breasthealth.com.au
www.theyoungones.asn.au

PHONE CONTACTS

Radiotherapy Department Reception
03 4215 2600 (General Enquiries)

Radiotherapy Nurses' Desk
03 4215 2603

www.barwonhealth.org.au

