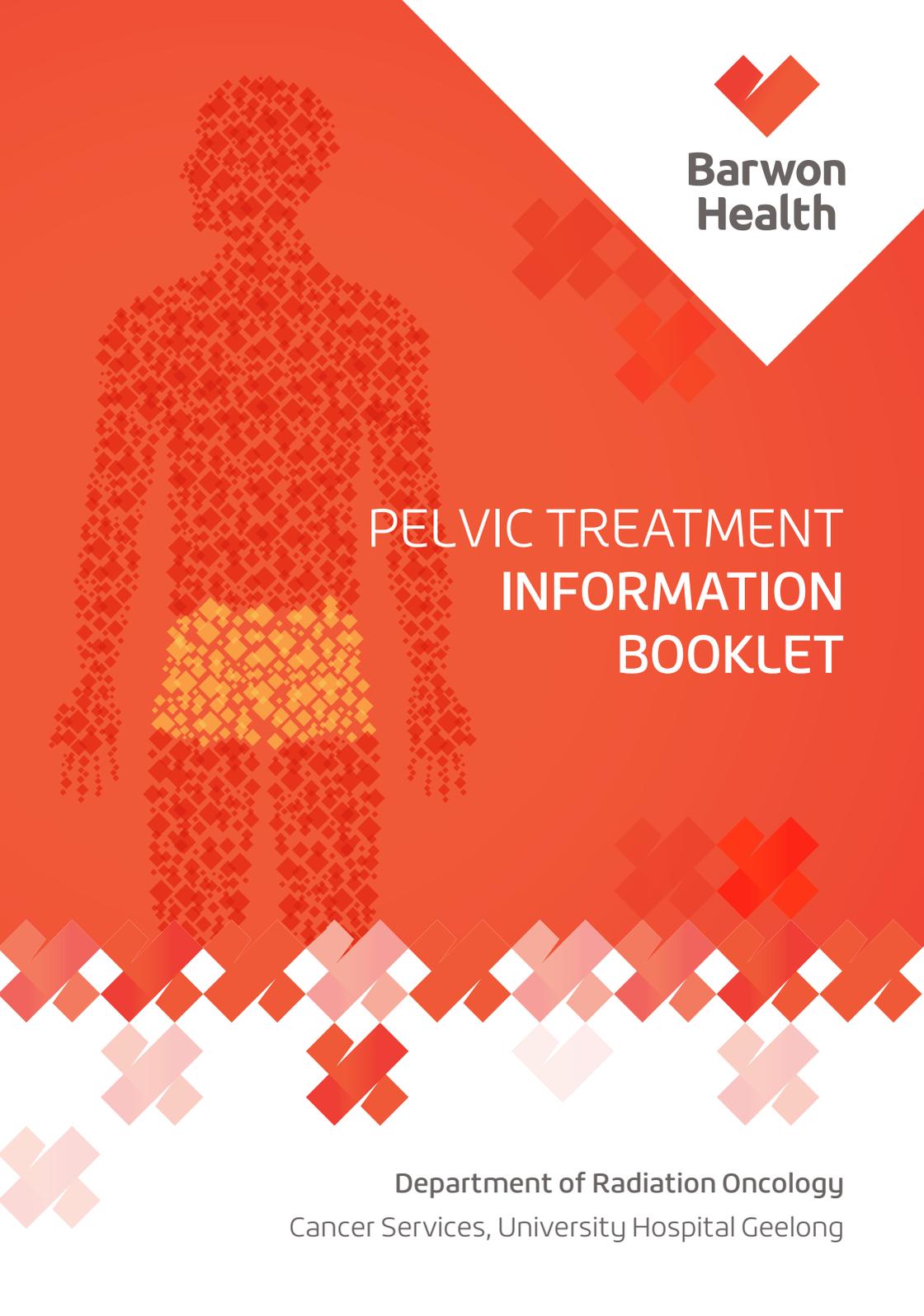




**Barwon  
Health**



**PELVIC TREATMENT  
INFORMATION  
BOOKLET**

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

## CONTENTS

- 1 What is radiotherapy?
- 2 What is the process?
- 5 Will I feel anything?
- 5 How will it affect my daily living?
- 6 What side-effects could occur?
- 8 What should I do for my skin?
- 9 Common questions

*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 people who have cancers that arise in (primary) or have spread to the pelvis (metastases). Many tumours can arise in the pelvis; for example prostate cancer, bladder cancer, cervix and endometrial cancers and rectal cancer.

Radiotherapy can be used with the aim to cure a cancer in the pelvis, or to control the symptoms that arise from cancer involving the other tissues within the pelvis.

Radiotherapy can be used in conjunction with other types of treatment; for example, surgery or chemotherapy or a combination of all of these. Special forms of radiotherapy such as intracavitary or interstitial brachytherapy treatment may be used along with radiotherapy treatment.

## 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.

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.

Following your planning session the radiotherapy nurse will discuss skin care with you as well as address any needs or concerns that you may have.

On the day of your first treatment please check 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.

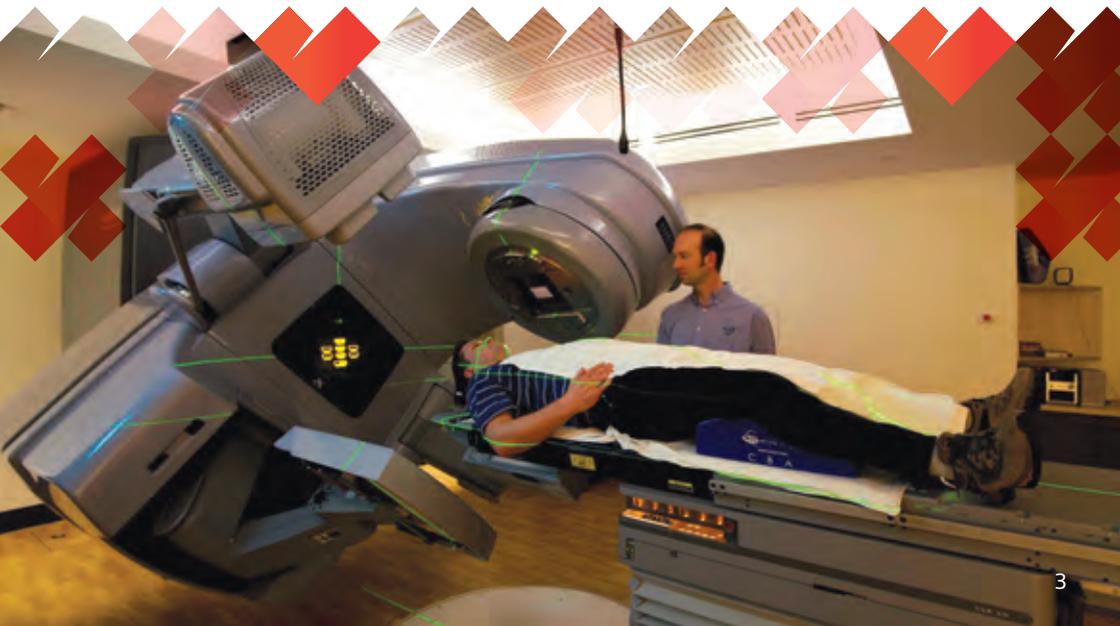
You will be in the treatment room for up to 10-15 minutes each visit and the treatment may last for approximately 30 seconds to one minute from several different angles.

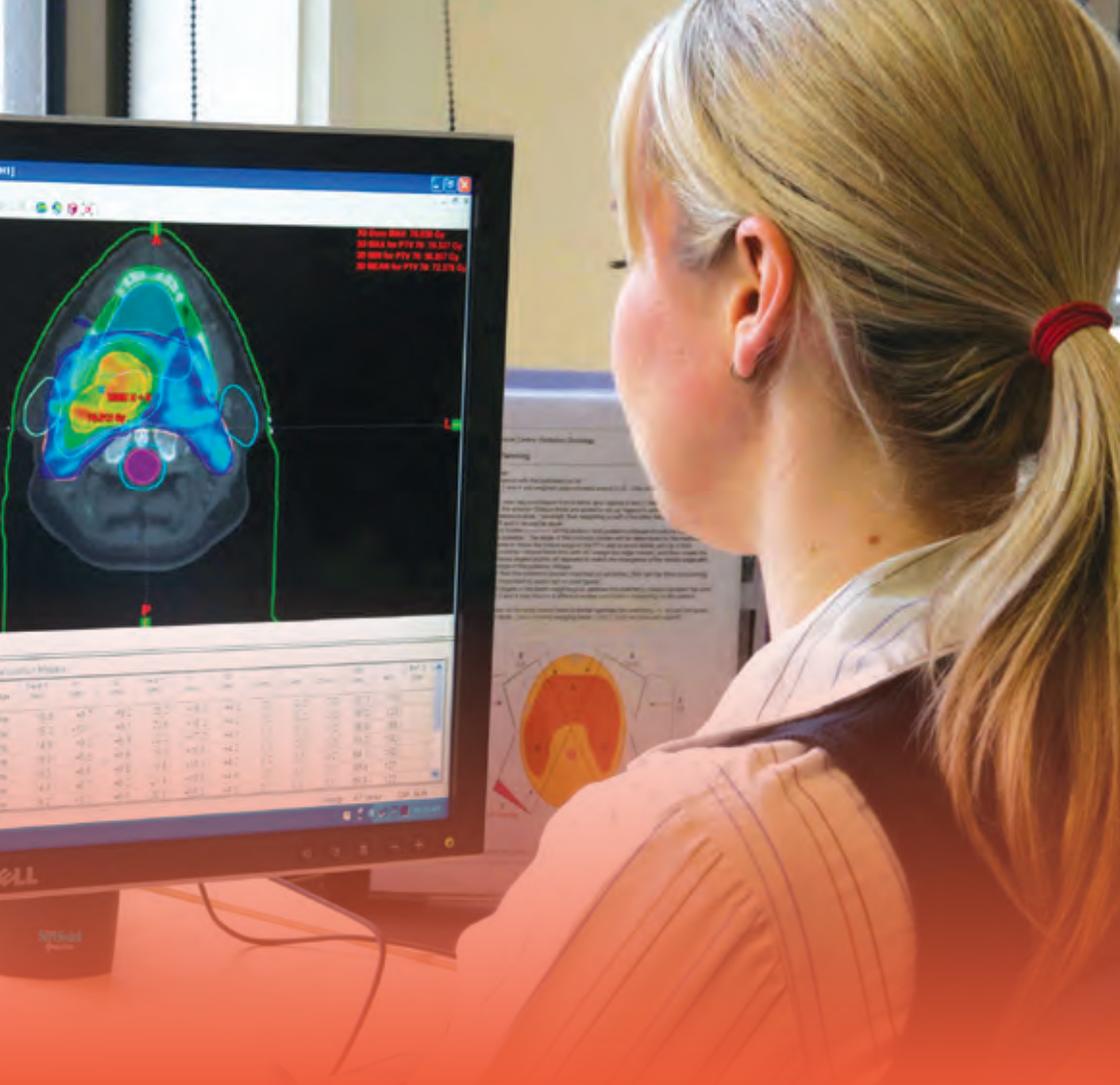
When you arrive each subsequent day for treatment, please hand your appointment booklet to the receptionists at the front desk and take a seat in the waiting room. You will then be invited through to the treatment area by one of the radiation therapists.

Whilst receiving radiotherapy, a doctor will see you once a week. This will take place in the department after your treatment. You may be in the centre up to one hour each day, depending on daily waiting times, and whether you need to see your doctor or one of the nurses.

You may see the oncology dietitian in your first week of treatment to discuss your dietary intake. Further visits if required 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 will make a noise but you will not feel or see anything. 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 your treatment 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 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 especially in the region of the perineum (genital and anal regions). These reactions usually settle two to three weeks after your radiotherapy has finished. A skin moisturizer will be given to you for use during treatment. See page 7 for skin care instructions.

### **Fatigue**

You may become increasingly tired as you progress through to the end of your treatment. This is a normal reaction to radiotherapy and each person is affected in varying degrees.

Finding a balance between rest and activity will help you cope with this side-effect.

### **Bowel irritation (including diarrhoea)**

This is not uncommon after two to three weeks of radiotherapy to the pelvis. There may be an increase in how often you feel the need to use your bowels. You may experience some discomfort if you strain and there may be some blood and mucous in the motions. There may be anal soreness if the anal canal is near the area being treated. These side-effects can be more pronounced if you are also receiving chemotherapy.

These changes are usually temporary and will correct themselves within a week or so after you finish treatment.

If discomfort is severe, soothing suppositories or ointment may be prescribed by your doctor. Changes in your diet may be beneficial and you will be seen by the oncology dietitian to help you with this. Report any diarrhoea to the nurses as the severity needs to be monitored and medication or a break in treatment may be necessary.

## **Bladder irritation**

The bladder may be in the radiation field if the tumour is situated in or near the bladder (for example, prostate, cervix, rectum). Because of this, some symptoms of bladder inflammation/irritation are common. This may cause burning of the urine (dysuria), increased urinary frequency, and may even be associated with blood, particles, or mucus in the urine. Speak to the nurse or your doctor to discuss treatment options should these symptoms occur.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO FOR MY SKIN?**

The following suggestions are helpful for the care of skin exposed to radiation:

### **During radiotherapy:**

- A skin moisturiser will be given to you. You should use this moisturizer in the area of treatment at least twice daily from the commencement of your treatment, then three to four times daily once your skin becomes pink.
- As the reaction deepens, you will need a different gel (Solugel) for skin care. The radiotherapy nurses will observe and advise you throughout your treatment.
- You may wash the treated skin with warm water and mild, perfumed soap. Pat skin dry - do not rub.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes. Loose cotton underwear is best.
- Do not use talcum powder.
- Avoid exposure of 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 further 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.

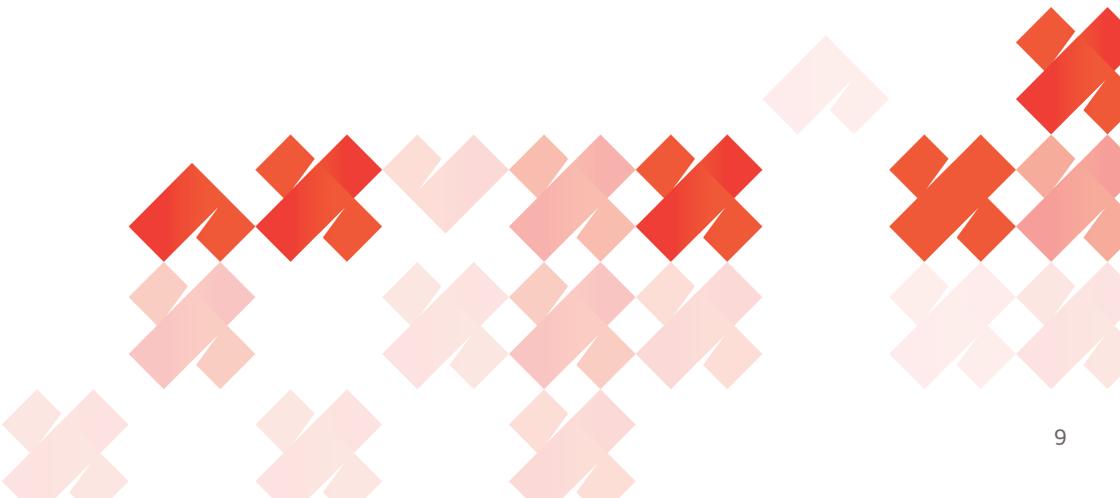
### **When do the side-effects settle?**

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 brochure.



## 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)

