

# Radiotherapy treatment

Questions and answers



## Welcome to the Radio-oncology Division

You've been prescribed a course of radiotherapy, which usually lasts several weeks. Our health care team has written this brochure to help you prepare. The aim is to answer your questions about what will happen during the sessions and the possible secondary effects of the treatment.

Every situation is different, so don't hesitate to ask for further explanations or to talk to us about your concerns at any time.

Prof. Raymond Miralbell  
Physician, Head of the  
Radio-oncology Division



## How is the treatment carried out?

### What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy consists in administering high-energy radiation to destroy cancer cells. It is often used in association with surgery and/or chemotherapy. It is also used to ease the symptoms of the illness (pain, haemorrhaging, etc.).

### Preparatory or simulation session

The aim of this session is to set up your individual treatment plan. During the simulation, you'll be given a scan. Using the images obtained, we can determine exactly which area to treat, the doses to administer and the organs to protect. The session lasts about one hour.

### Keep the same position

The position you take during the scan is the same one you must take at each treatment session.

You must remain immobile for the entire duration of the scan. If it is your head or neck that is to undergo treatment, it will be immobilized using a mask moulded directly on your face. You must wear the mask at each session.

Tiny tattoo points are drawn on your skin so that the technicians know exactly where to direct the rays.

### Constant contact with you

During the scan and during the radiation sessions, you will be in constant contact with the radiology technician by means of a video camera and an interphone. This allows the health care team to make sure everything is going well and to stop the treatment at any time if necessary or at your request.

At the end of the session, we will ask your permission to take an ID photo. The photo is attached to your file and will enable the team to identify you as soon as you arrive in the waiting room.

## Info +

### Important

The fact of receiving radiation does not make you radioactive. There is therefore no risk for your family, friends and colleagues.

# The radiotherapy sessions

## What happens during the sessions?

The sessions start a few days after the simulation to allow the medical x-ray technicians and doctors time to calculate your treatment plan.

The technician helps you get into the position established during the simulation, to ensure that the radiation is directed at exactly the area determined. You must remain perfectly immobile while receiving the treatment.

Irradiation is completely invisible and painless, but the machines are very big, emit various noises and turn around you, and you may find this unsettling.

## How long do the sessions last?

The treatment as such lasts about 10 minutes, to which must be added the time it takes you to prepare (undress and dress) in a booth leading into the treatment room. On the day of your weekly medical appointment with the radio-oncologist, please remain in the waiting room after the treatment; a nurse will call you when the radio-oncologist is ready to see you.

## How often are the sessions?

The doctor establishes how many sessions you will need before the treatment is started.

As a rule, you will have one session per day, from Monday to Friday. Sometimes a session has to be cancelled because of a technical problem. In that case, it is postponed to the end of the treatment, because it is important that you receive the entire dose of radiation prescribed.

## The secondary effects

Whether or not you develop any secondary effects will depend on the region being radiated, the dose of radiation delivered and how sensitive you are to the treatment. The radio-oncologist sees you once a week to assess your tolerance of the radiation. If he or she observes any secondary effects, they will prescribe the appropriate medication and the nurse will explain how to use and apply it.

### Fatigue

Fatigue appears most frequently when large areas such as the abdomen are radiated, or when the skull is treated. If you suffer serious fatigue, you should perhaps cut back on your activities by working part-time and take time to rest. The health care team can help you find ways to make your daily life easier.

### Redness of the skin

The radiation can affect your skin in the same way as sun-burn (redness, burning sensation, etc.). This makes your skin sensitive and fragile. In some cases, redness appears and increases even after the treatment, then gradually disappears. The health care team will help you deal with the problem, prescribing effective creams. Here are a few tips:

- Wash the radiated area with water or very mild soap. Pat it dry, don't rub.
- Use the creams prescribed and, if you are told to do so, rinse the radiated area with warm water after the session.
- Do not use irritants such as perfume, eau de toilette or deodorant on the radiated area.
- Wear loose, preferably cotton clothes, as certain synthetic fabrics can irritate the skin.
- Avoid swimming in a pool or exposing your skin to the sun while the treatment lasts. Sunbathing is contraindicated for one year after the end of radiotherapy.

## Follow-up during and after your treatment

For the entire duration of the radiotherapy, you will have weekly appointments with the radio-oncologist to assess your tolerance of the therapy and how well it is going. At the end of the treatment, the radio-oncologist makes sure that appointments have been made with your oncologist, surgeon or family physician. He or she will see you for a check-up four to six weeks after the end of the treatment.

Please do not hesitate to ask further questions of any member of the health care team, all of whom are happy to provide additional advice.

Your notes and questions:

## Your health care team

The Radio-oncology Division is made up of many professionals working together to ensure your treatment goes well.

### **Receptionist**

The receptionist welcomes you, prepares your file and schedules your appointments with the doctor.

### **Radio-oncologist**

The radio-oncologist is specialized in the use of radiation to treat cancers and is in charge of your treatment.

### **Medical x-ray technician**

The medical x-ray technician helps plan and administer your treatment. He or she settles you into position for the session and administers the radiation.

### **Radio-physicist**

The radio-physicist helps calculate the dose of radiation you are to receive and monitors the technical performance of the machines for optimum security.

### **Reference nurse**

You will be assigned a reference nurse for the duration of the treatment. He or she will monitor the appearance and development of any secondary effects, provide care and remain attentive to your well-being.

### **Dietician**

The dietician monitors your nutritional status during the treatment and provides advice on your diet.

## Practical information

### Treatment costs

The cost of radiotherapy and the intermediate invoices are high, and you should send them to your insurance company without delay. If the insurance company is slow to reimburse you, you can contact the HUG Accounts Receivable Division at ☎ 022 305 56 80 80 (9 a.m. - 12 p.m. and 2-4 p.m.) to ask for a payment extension; please provide the relevant invoice number.

### Refreshments

Beverages and snacks are available in our waiting rooms. Take the time to rest before or after the session.

### Transportation help

If transportation is a problem, ask the nurses for information on the possibilities for obtaining help.

### Advice and support

Ligue genevoise contre le cancer (Geneva Cancer League)  
☎ 022 322 13 33

### Opening hours

7.30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

The service is closed on week-ends and public holidays, and occasionally on equipment maintenance days.

### ✉ Address

Service de radio-oncologie  
Avenue de la Roseaie 53, 1205 Genève  
T 022 382 70 90, F 022 382 71 17

This brochure had been prepared by the health care team at the HUG Radio-oncology Division and the Information Group for Patients and Family (GIPP).