University College Hospital

Having radiotherapy to the prostate: preparation for treatment

Radiotherapy Department
Patient information series

№56
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We will try our best to meet your needs.
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Introduction
This booklet has been written for patients who are about to start a course of radiotherapy to the prostate. Before starting radiotherapy planning and treatment you will need to follow special instructions on preparing your bladder and bowels. This preparation process ensures your internal organs (rectum, bladder, small bowel) can be moved away from the area to be treated, and to make sure your internal organs on the treatment days are in the same position as on your radiotherapy planning scan. It is important that you understand and follow the instructions for preparation given to you. This booklet describes what needs to be done and what you need to do throughout your treatment.

We understand that this is a worrying time for patients. You may feel that you have been given lots of information about what needs to be done in a short period of time. We hope this booklet answers some of your questions. If you still have any questions or concerns, please let your doctor, nurse or radiographer know. We are here for you.

What is prostate?

![Diagram of male reproductive and urinary system](image1)

**Figure 1**
The prostate is a gland about the size and shape of a walnut. The prostate gland is located in front of the rectum, just below the bladder and it surrounds the urethra (Figure 1). The urethra carries urine from the bladder out through the penis.

**Why is bowel preparation important?**
Bowel preparation on a daily basis during your treatment is important because:

- It will improve the accuracy of your treatment.
- It will reduce the risk of any long-term bowel side effects.

**Why is bladder preparation important?**
When having radiotherapy to the prostate it is important that you have a comfortably full bladder, and maintain a similar bladder size for each treatment. The reasons for this are:

- A larger bladder will limit the amount of bladder and small bowel in the treatment area which will help to reduce any side effects you may experience.
- It will help maintain treatment accuracy on a daily basis.

**What will happen before my CT scan?**
One to two weeks before your radiotherapy planning appointment you will be sent an appointment to come to the radiotherapy department to see the radiotherapy care team.

The radiotherapy care team will explain the bladder and bowel preparation process to you.
The preparation process

When you meet with the radiotherapy care team they will explain the bladder preparation process to you. We need to find out how much fluid you can comfortably hold in your bladder for 30 to 45 minutes. You will be given written instructions on how to follow the bladder preparation process and to note down how much liquid you can hold, and for how long.

You will be prescribed suppositories to use on a daily basis to prepare your rectum for treatment. The suppository causes your rectum to empty with a bowel movement, or passing of wind. The suppository will need to be inserted into your rectum. You will be asked to do this for yourself.

The radiotherapy care team will give you written instructions on when and how to use the suppositories effectively. You will be asked to practice inserting the suppositories for five days up to your radiotherapy CT planning scan. Once you have had your scan, you will not need to insert the suppositories until the first day of your radiotherapy treatment.

What are suppositories?

Suppositories are solid, bullet-shaped preparations designed for easy insertion into the anus (back passage). They are normally made of a solid vegetable oil that contains the medicine. The suppository dissolves at body temperature and gradually spreads the medicine over the lower bowel (rectum) where it is absorbed into the bloodstream. A suppository is used to prepare your rectum. It causes your rectum to empty with a bowel movement or passing of wind.

Although the prospect of using a suppository everyday sounds unpleasant, the majority of patients tolerate it well.

If you suffer from haemorrhoids and have problems inserting the suppository, please speak to a member of the radiotherapy care team.
What will happen when I come for my radiotherapy CT planning scan?
For your planning appointment you will be asked to bring your suppositories with you. At this appointment the planning radiographers will ask you to:

• Empty your bladder.

• Insert a suppository and wait for your bowels to empty. Even if you have already opened your bowels on the day of your scan, you will still need to use a suppository to make sure your rectum is empty. Drink three cups of water, after you have emptied your bowels. This is available in the waiting area.

• Wait for 30 minutes, to allow for your bladder to fill (comfortably), before you have your radiotherapy planning scan. If you do not feel your bladder is full after thirty minutes please tell the radiographers. You may have to drink more water.

What will happen when I come for radiotherapy treatment?
• Please arrive at least 45 minutes before your radiotherapy treatment appointment. At each appointment you will need to:

• Empty your bladder.

• Insert a suppository and wait to empty your bowels. You may have already done this process at home.

• After emptying your bowels, drink the prescribed amount of water that you drank at your planning CT scan. This is available in the waiting area.

• Wait for 30 minutes, to allow for your bladder to fill (comfortably), before you have your radiotherapy treatment. If you do not feel your bladder is full after thirty minutes please tell the radiographers.
For each radiotherapy appointment, you should allow up to two hours. You should aim to arrive at least 45 minutes before your given treatment appointment time, to allow for the above process.

**It is important that you understand and follow the instructions for treatment preparation given to you.**

If you have any difficulty following the instructions please discuss this with the radiographers treating you. There may be various reasons for this problem, including side effects to your bladder and bowels. You should only modify the routine for your bladder/bowel preparation as a result of discussion and agreement with your radiotherapy doctor.

If you still have any questions or concerns, please let your doctor, radiographer or nurse know. We are here for you.

**Patient questions**

**Do I need to use the suppositories over the weekend?**

No, you only have to use the suppositories on the days that you attend for your radiotherapy treatment.

**Can I eat after inserting a suppository?**

Yes, you can eat normally after inserting a suppository.

**Even if I have emptied my bowels naturally, do I still need to use a suppository before my treatment?**

Yes, even if you have already opened your bowels naturally on the day of your treatment, you will still need to use a suppository to make sure your rectum is empty.
Useful contact numbers

**Brachytherapy Radiographer**
Eleanor Gill
Direct telephone: 020 3447 3782
Switchboard: 020 3456 7890
bleep 1128
Email: eleanor.armstrong@uclh.nhs.uk

**Radiotherapy Care Team**
Direct telephone: 020 3447 3729
Main switchboard: 0845 155 5000
ext 73729
bleep 2222, 5825 or 2075
Alternative switchboard: 020 3456 7890
ext 73729
bleep 2222, 5825 or 2075

**Macmillan Information and Support Radiographer**
Mark Williams
Direct telephone: 020 3447 3711
Main switchboard: 0845 155 5000
ext 73711
bleep 1458
Alternative switchboard: 020 3456 7890
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Email: mark.williams@uclh.nhs.uk

**Dr Payne’s Secretary:**
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