Preparing for radiotherapy treatment to your pelvis

Your consultant has prescribed a course of radiotherapy to your pelvis. In order for the radiographers to plan and deliver this treatment accurately it is required that you prepare your bladder and bowels each day. Radiotherapy to the pelvis causes side effects which can be reduced with careful management and preparation. Side effects can include diarrhoea, cystitis and more frequent bladder and bowel urgency.

Why prepare?

Radiation treatment to the pelvis will cause an unavoidable dose to the surrounding healthy tissues which causes the side effects. Your pelvic anatomy can be influenced by simple preparations to help deliver doses more effectively and help reduce side effects.

A full bladder expands away from the pelvic floor resulting in less bladder irradiation. A full bladder will also move the small bowel away from the treatment dose area reducing the risk of diarrhoea. This is an advantage when treating prostate, prostate bed, rectum, anal, uterine and cervical areas.

When treating the bladder itself, having an empty bladder can shrink the area required to be treated giving improved dose sparing to surrounding healthy tissues.

When the rectum is empty it falls away from the other pelvic structures. By having an empty rectum, less of the rectal wall will be exposed. Rectums can be full of both faeces and gas.

What will I be asked to do?

1. On the day of your planning scan please ensure you eat breakfast / lunch as normal and arrive ‘as you are’. Please do not arrive with a prepared bladder; your planning team will give you a full explanation and instructions on the day.
2. On arrival a member of the planning team will ask you to empty your bladder and preferably your bowels as well (if possible).
3. An ultra sound will be taken to assess if there is any residual fluid left in the bladder which can be an indication of retention which we can address. This scan takes a short time and
involves a small amount of jelly being placed on the lower abdomen while pressure is lightly applied with a probe.

Please note that patients undergoing radiotherapy to the bladder will only be required to empty their bladder and bowels (if possible) to prepare for radiotherapy (skip to step 9).

4. Based on the results of the ultrasound you will be given a drinking plan by your planning team and asked to prepare. Typically this is drinking 500ml (2½ of the cups in our reception) of water and then waiting for 60 minutes for your bladder to fill. All water should be drunk in less than 5 minutes.

5. Before you have your CT planning scan a member of the planning team will check your bladder size again with the ultrasound machine.

6. You may have additional ultrasound scans during your treatment to ensure your bladder is full. Ideally the bladder size should be consistent throughout your treatment course so we ask that you please follow the plan assigned to you.

7. Bladder filling can be practiced before you attend for planning by drinking 500 ml of water and holding for 60 minutes before passing urine.

8. It may help if you Drink 300ml of water with each meal to help address overall hydration. Once you are adequately hydrated your bladder will fill more consistently. Reducing alcohol and caffeine intake will also help.

9. The rectum can be full with both faeces and gas. We therefore ask you to avoid food and drink that you know make you gassy. Avoiding carbonated drinks will also help. You may be asked to change your diet during treatment, please avoid making any changes until you have been asked to do so by a member of the planning or treatment team.

10. Please discuss any concerns you may have with a member of your planning and treatment teams, we are here to help!

Contact
If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact the Radiotherapy reception on +44 (0)20 7460 5626/7, or call our Switchboard on +44 (0)20 7460 2000. If the radiotherapy department is unavailable please contact the oncology ward on +44 (0)20 7460 5992.