

Radiotherapy Information

What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is a treatment that involves superficial X-Rays. X-Rays damage the abnormal skin cells that are causing your skin lesion and allow the normal skin to grow back again.

Why is treatment necessary?

Radiotherapy is used to treat superficial types of skin cancer including Basal Cell Carcinoma (Rodent Ulcers), Squamous Cell Carcinoma, and Lentigo Maligna Melanoma. Treatment is necessary to stop the growth and spread of these types of skin cancer. It is therefore extremely important that you attend your hospital appointment.

How successful is treatment?

Radiotherapy is 95% successful for skin cancers and this compares favourably with other treatments.

Where is Radiotherapy available?

Radiotherapy machines are extremely expensive and treatment is only available in the Oncology Centre at the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton. The Sussex Oncology Centre is situated on the Eastern side of the hospital, adjacent to Bristol Gate. Car parking is available by the side of Eastern Road or in front of the Oncology Centre (tokens may be purchased inside the Oncology centre at a cost of £1). Please let your doctor know if you require assistance with transport so that they may arrange a hospital car or an ambulance.

What does treatment involve?

You will be normally referred for a clinic appointment with Dr Mitra or one of his clinical team. The treatment will be explained to you and you will be asked to give written consent. The skin site will be marked up and calculations will be made to decide how much X-Ray treatment is required. Your treatment will normally start on the same day of your clinic appointment and it may take 60-90 minutes to complete all the necessary measurements. The actual X-Ray treatment only takes about 2-3 minutes. Most patients require 5 treatments which are given on 5 consecutive days - Monday to Friday.

What are the immediate side-effects of treatment?

Superficial X-Rays damage the top layers of the skin and will normally produce a reaction within a few days. Please avoid soaps, deodorants and perfume during treatment. The skin site may get worse before it gets better. Initially, the skin may become dry and red like sunburn. A crusted scab will usually form within 10 days, which will fall off revealing an ulcer that will heal in 4-6 weeks. You may shower during this time but please do not rub the skin. Occasionally, the area may be very itchy and sore. A cream may be applied to the area to settle down this reaction.

What are the long-term side-effects of treatment?

Skin treated by radiotherapy will normally be paler and thinner than surrounding skin. This takes months to years to develop and sometimes red blood vessels may become visible. These changes are normally permanent, although the majority of patients are normally satisfied with the cosmetic appearance. Some patients choose to cover the area with cosmetic camouflage make-up. In certain circumstances, radiotherapy can produce better cosmetic results than skin surgery.

What follow up will I require?

Most patients are seen 6 weeks after treatment to assess the skin and response to treatment. You will then be discharged back to the care of your general practitioner or hospital specialist. Long-term follow up is not normally necessary. You should always watch the skin site and report any unexpected skin changes to your doctor if concerned.