

Radiotherapy Breast Treatment



Health

Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

Illawarra & Shoalhaven
Cancer Care Centres

PLEASE BRING THIS BOOKLET TO EVERY APPOINTMENT

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General information



This booklet will help you with your journey through radiation treatment. The information is general and may not always apply to you. Please talk with your treating team if you have any questions.



IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Illawarra
Cancer Care
Ph: 4222 5200

Shoalhaven
Cancer Care
Ph: 4428 7400

You will need to contact your doctor, breast care nurse, or go to your nearest Emergency Department during your treatment if you have:

- Severe pain in the treatment area
- Blisters, swelling, weeping, bleeding or pus in the treated area
- A temperature of 38 degrees or higher

Need an interpreter?

Professional interpreters are available if you need help to communicate in English, or if you are Deaf. Our staff can also ask for an interpreter. The staff will book an interpreter for you. Interpreter Services are free and confidential. You can bring a family member or friend with you to the appointment. If you need help to communicate it should be through a professional interpreter.

You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 1800 24 72 72 if you need to speak to us before an appointment.

Support services



There are a number of services available to help support both you and your family.

- Counselling support for patients and carers affected by cancer
- Legal and financial assistance:
Cancer Council 13 11 20
www.canassist.com.au/
- Advance care planning/Advance care directive:
Making plans now for your future healthcare needs when you are no longer able to make decisions for yourself
- Travel & accommodation subsidy (IPTAAS):
If travelling more than 200km per week
www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/services/iptaas
- Mobility parking scheme:
Go to the website, download the form, see your GP, and go to your nearest Service NSW office.
www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roads/using-roads/mobility-parking/documents-forms.html
- Practical help in the home:
My Aged Care 1800 200 422
Carer Gateway 1800 422 737
CANTEEN - support for young people 12-24 years.
- Centrelink - apply online for payments such as Jobseeker, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment or Carer Allowance.

If you require any more information or help please ask staff

My radiotherapy care team



Radiation oncologist

Contact: _____

What they do:

A doctor who prescribes radiotherapy and organises your treatment.

Radiation oncology registrar

Contact: _____

What they do:

A doctor who is training to be an oncologist. They are always supervised by your radiation oncologist.

Breast care nurse

Contact: _____

What they do:

A nurse with specialised knowledge of breast cancer who will help coordinate your care, provide information, referrals and support.

Radiation therapist

Contact: _____

What they do:

Specially trained to plan and deliver your treatment. They will also help support you through treatment.

Radiotherapy nurse

Contact: _____

What they do:

Specialise in caring for people having radiation therapy. They manage your side effects, and will help support you through treatment.

Social worker

Contact: _____

What they do:

Provides counselling, support and information for you and your family. They can help with important conversations in planning for your future.

Psychologist

Contact: _____

What they do:

Provides psychological assessment and interventions for cancer patients, and where required, to families and carers.

Radiation oncology medical physicist

Contact: _____

What they do:

Ensures that your treatment is delivered accurately and safely. You may see them at your planning appointment or during your treatment.

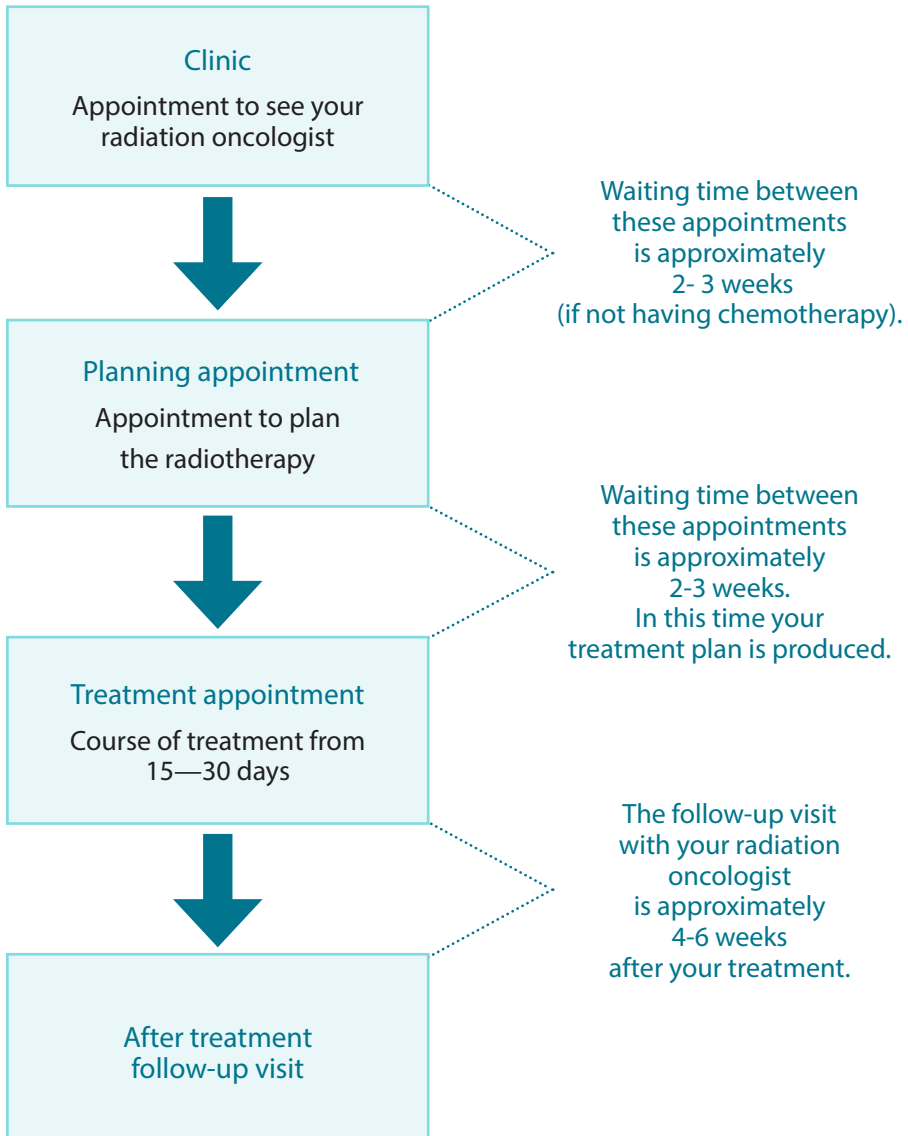
Physiotherapist / Lymphoedema therapist

Contact: _____

What they do:

Help with exercise programs and give advice on dealing with everyday activities. If needed, provide education and monitoring to assist in the prevention of lymphoedema (swelling).

Your pathway





Linear Accelerator

What is radiotherapy?



Radiotherapy uses x-ray beams to kill cancer cells.

A **linear accelerator** is a machine that delivers radiation to your body. It only gives radiation to the specific area that is being treated.

Your **radiation oncologist** will decide how much radiation you will receive and how many times you will receive it.

When deciding this, they will take into account:

- Your age
- Your overall health, including any other medical conditions you may have
- If you had surgery, the type of operation you had to the breast and lymph nodes
- Details about your specific cancer obtained from the surgery (i.e. the pathology of your cancer).

From your surgery, information about your cancer is used to decide which areas need to be treated.

After you have had surgery, the remaining breast tissue is treated.

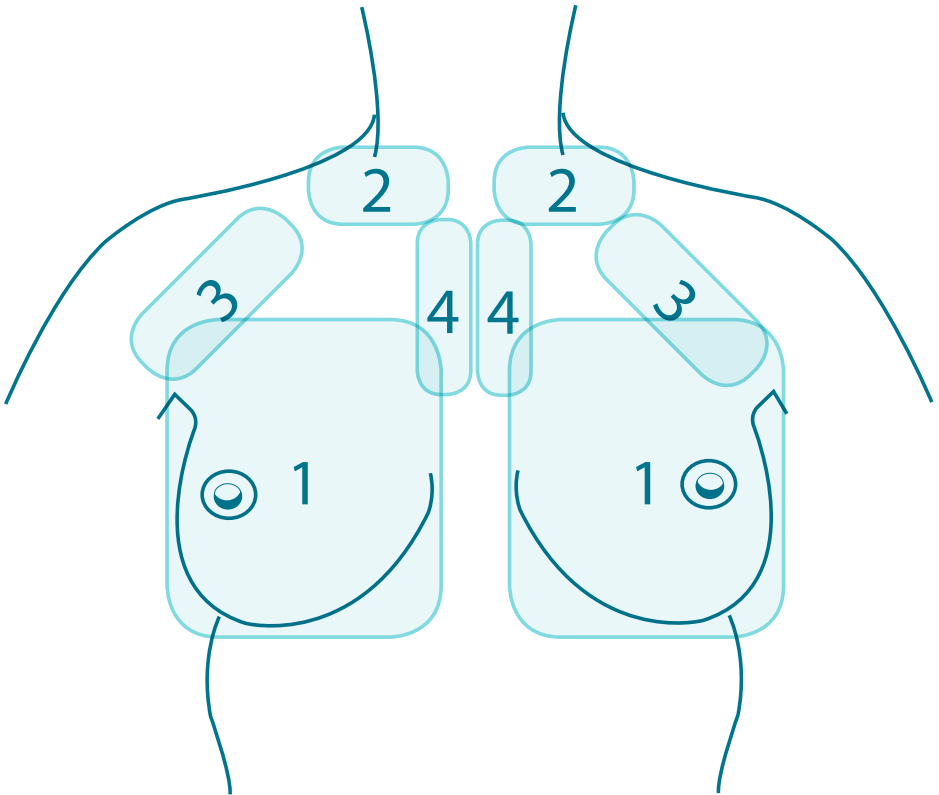
Sometimes, your oncologist may recommend treating your lymph nodes.

These nodes can be found under your arm, above your collar bone or in the middle of your chest (see image on the next page).

The nodes are called:

- Axillary: under your arm
- Supraclavicular: above your collar bone
- Internal mammary: in the middle of your chest

Only the areas required to be treated will be affected by the radiation.



Treatment areas

1. Breast or chest wall
2. Supraclavicular fossa
(lymph glands at the root of the neck)
3. Axillary lymph nodes
(lymph glands in the underarm)
4. Internal mammary chain lymph nodes

Notes



What Side Effects Can The Treatment Cause?



Radiotherapy can cause both short- and long-term side effects. Short-term side effects occur from 10 to 14 days into your treatment. Long-term side effects can occur from 1 to 2 years after your treatment has finished.

It is important that you stop smoking during radiotherapy. Smoking can increase the chance of side effects of the treatment as well as reduce the chances of being cured from your cancer.

Common short-term side effects

Skin

Your skin may become pink or red, or feel warm. It could be dry, itchy, flaky or feel more sensitive to touch than usual.

You might have pain or swelling of the treated breast. Sometimes the skin can blister and weep, but this is less common.

Fatigue/Tiredness

The amount of tiredness varies for each person. It usually builds up over the course of your treatment. Most people are able to continue working during radiotherapy.

Long-term side effects

Lung inflammation and scarring

All patients having breast radiotherapy will have a small area of the lung treated. This may result in some scarring in the lung, which may be seen on x-rays taken months to years after your treatment.

Your breathing should not be affected at all.

Skin

Your skin may have a light tan in the area which was treated. It is not usually noticeable. Some people from certain ethnic backgrounds may have a more pronounced tan.

The skin of the breast that was treated may feel slightly different to the other breast. It is often described as feeling a bit thicker, but is usually not noticeable.

Small blood vessels may be seen on the skin of the breast months to years after the radiation.

Breast tissue

You may experience breast tenderness and short lived shooting pains. During and after the radiotherapy, it is common for the breast to develop some minor swelling. The breast may feel heavier and more sensitive than the other breast. This will resolve over time.

Lymphoedema (swelling)

Only if treating the lymph node area in your armpit. Lymphoedema is swelling of the arm and can reduce movement of the arm. Please talk to your radiation oncologist or breast care nurse to discuss your individual risk of developing lymphoedema.

Rare side effects

Breast hardening and shrinkage

There may be severe reddening or blistering during radiotherapy.

The breast area could also harden and shrink over time.

Around 1 in 1000 women will be extremely sensitive to radiation treatment.

This is often due to an underlying condition that they have.

Heart disease

For patients receiving radiotherapy to their left breast, a small amount of heart will be treated.

This may increase the risk of damage to your heart many years later. Due to changes in technology this is becoming less common.

Rib pain and fracture

Suffering a broken rib due to the radiation treatment is extremely rare. Some women experience rib pain and tenderness after treatment. This could be due to inflammation of the tissue around the area which was treated.

Second cancer

The risk of the radiation treatment causing a second cancer is extremely rare. If it does cause a second cancer it will be in the treated area.

Radiotherapy Planning Appointment



On this day we will make equipment to keep you still, take a CT scan and mark the treatment area.

Please allow 1 – 2 hours for this appointment.

If your breast or your skin is red and warm to touch please inform staff as sometimes your planning appointment may need to be delayed.

This appointment starts the planning process of your treatment.

At the planning appointment, we will give you information. This will be on the radiotherapy process and side effects. It is important to understand what is going to happen.

You will also be given a survey to complete that will take 5 to 10 minutes. The survey will ask you questions about your health and wellbeing.

An appointment card with your start date and time for your radiotherapy treatment will be given to you.

Identity Check

Before we can start, you will be asked to tell us:

- Your name.
- Your date of birth.
- What area on your body will be treated with radiotherapy.

This is a NSW Health requirement and helps us to identify you. It confirms we are treating the right person and part of your body. We will ask you this every day when you attend your radiotherapy treatment.

During the planning appointment

You will change into a gown at the beginning of the appointment.

You only need to remove the top half of your clothing.

There are 3 steps to the planning appointment:

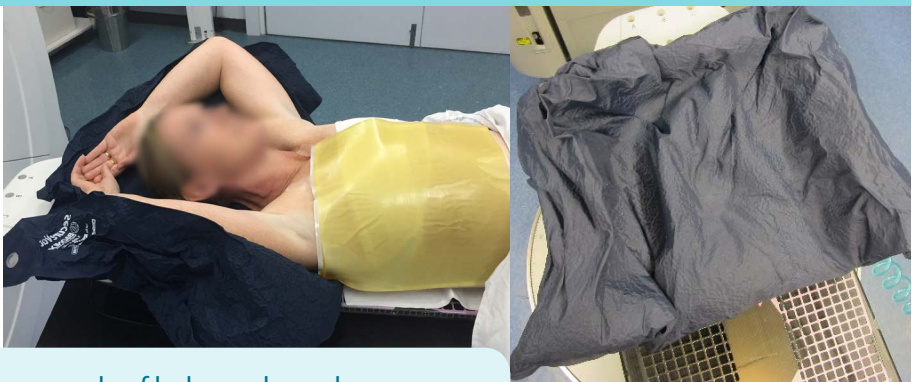
1. Make equipment for your treatment
2. Take a CT scan of the treatment area
3. Create tattoos and photos.

1. Equipment

We will use equipment that helps you to be stable and still for your treatment.

You will lie on the CT scanner bed in a “bean-bag” (called a vacbag). It will shape around your upper back and shoulders.

If required, we may place a jelly like material on your skin where you are being treated, this is called bolus. We use this when we need the radiation dose close to your skin.



An example of bolus and a vacbag



2. CT (computed tomography) Scan

Texta and sticky markers will be placed on your skin before the CT scan. These help us to map out the treatment area and can be seen on the scan.

A CT scan will be taken of your chest area while you are laying in the equipment we have made for your treatment.

You will need to lie still and breathe normally during this scan unless the staff give you other instructions.

The staff will leave the room while the scan is being performed.

This scan is used to plan your treatment.

3. Tattoos and photos

You will be given small permanent tattoos at the end of the planning appointment. These make sure we put you in the same position on the treatment bed each day.

We will take photos of how you have been setup and the equipment that has been made for your treatment. These also help treatment staff set you up in the same position each day.



CT Scanner and the size of the tattoo

Radiotherapy Planning

Your radiation team will create a plan for you between your planning appointment and the start of your treatment.

The CT (computed tomography) scan that was taken at your planning appointment is used to create the plan. It is designed specifically for you. This can take up to 2 weeks depending on how difficult the individual plan is.

Sometimes the start of treatment can be delayed due to the difficulty of the plan.

Many checks are completed to make sure we are going to be delivering the right treatment for you.



Radiotherapy Team

Radiotherapy Treatment



You will receive radiotherapy daily. You will be set up in the same position as your planning appointment. It will take 10 to 25 minutes for your treatment.

Treatment times

Treatment is usually given 5 days a week from Monday to Friday.

A list of appointment times will be given to you every week.

Please check these because your appointment times may change.

On some days the treatment machines will need to be closed for maintenance. We will let you know of these days ahead of time and put signs outside the treatment room to remind you. Some people still need to receive treatment. Staff will let you know if you will be having treatment on these days.

If you need to change an appointment time, please tell the radiation therapist. You need to do this as soon as possible so we can try to arrange a better time.

It may not be possible to change your appointment times. This is because there are many other patients also receiving treatment.

If you are running late or unable to make it to your appointment, please call as soon as possible.

Your first treatment appointment

On your first day please arrive 15 minutes before your appointment time. Please see the nurses at the nurse's desk before you sit down.

A radiation therapist will explain what will happen and answer any questions you may have.

Your first treatment is usually longer than your other appointments. This is because as we need to check measurements from your planning appointment.

Please allow an hour on your first day. This will allow us to give you all the information you need and deliver your treatment.

Arriving in radiotherapy

Please check yourself in for your treatment. You do this by scanning the barcode on your appointment card at the nurse's desk. If it is not your first treatment, once you have checked in you can take a seat in the waiting room.

A radiation therapist will come and get you when they are ready for you to have your treatment.

How long will my treatment take?

The time needed to deliver your treatment can be between 10 – 25 minutes.

The time in the treatment room includes:

- Getting you into the correct position
- Delivering your treatment
- Helping you in and out of the room.



Patient on the linear accelerator

In the treatment room

Before we can give you your treatment, you will be asked to tell us:

- Your name
- Your date of birth
- What area on your body will be treated with radiotherapy.

During your treatment you are able to listen to music. We can make a playlist for you, or you can bring in your own music.

Once you are in position, the radiation therapists will leave the room. They will then start the treatment. They can see and hear you during the treatment (the room has television monitors and an intercom).

When the radiation therapist leaves the treatment room:

- You will be in the room by yourself for 5 to 10 minutes
- It is important to lie still during the treatment and breathe normally
- Parts of the machine will move into position to take x-rays. These x-rays are taken before we give you your treatment to make sure everything lines up and we are treating the correct area.
- The treatment machine moves around you to give you your treatment, but it does not touch you
- You can alert us at any time by talking or raising your hand
- You will not be able to see or feel anything during the treatment, however you will hear a noise when the machine turns on.

During your course of radiation treatment

All instructions given to you by the radiation staff need to be followed for every treatment.

Tell the radiation staff as soon as possible if you are not able to follow these instructions.

You will have x-rays taken throughout your treatment. This is to check the position of the treatment area. The x-rays are not used to check on how the treatment is working. Other measurements are also taken during your treatment. This is to check for any changes in your body shape.

Our radiation team will check on your well-being and side effects daily, as well as formally review you once a week.

If you need more help, they can arrange for you to see other staff in your radiotherapy care team.



Please tell the radiotherapy team about side-effects or any other problems that you may be having. It is important that we know this information.

Managing side effects during treatment



Side effects generally do not start until 2 to 3 weeks into your treatment. Please let staff know if you notice any changes in the treatment area.

Skin

Radiotherapy does not 'burn' the skin. The radiation disrupts the normal skin renewal process and it may look similar to a sunburn.

Changes to the skin usually start about 10 to 14 days after treatment has started.

Skin changes may get gradually worse during treatment. They may also get worse a week or two after treatment has finished.

There is no need to apply creams or lotions before your treatment starts.

Please let your treatment staff know if you notice any changes in the treatment area. (If you would like to see photos of what your skin could look like please ask your treating team.)

Mepitel Film

When you start your radiotherapy, a special dressing called Mepitel Film may be applied to the treatment area.

Mepitel Film is a thin, see-through dressing that protects and helps to heal the skin during and after the completion of radiotherapy.

In some people, the Mepitel Film may not stick well or may not be suitable.

Mepitel Film is only useful if it stays on for the duration of your treatment. If it is not suitable for you, your treatment will still work.

How does it work?

Mepitel Film is used as a protective layer on the skin. It helps to protect the fragile skin from the daily friction of clothes and moisture. This helps your body to recover from treatment without being disturbed.

When will the Mepitel be applied?

We will apply the film to your breast or chest wall in the first week of your radiotherapy. The time taken to place the film will vary from patient to patient. Please allow for up to 20 minutes for the first application.



Mepitel

How long will the Mepitel Film stay on for?

The Mepitel film will be on your skin for the duration of treatment and for 1-2 weeks after you finish. We will check how well the film is sticking to your skin on a daily basis whilst you are on the treatment bed. If there are small areas where the film is peeling from your skin, the staff will trim and replace these areas.

Can I shower as normal with the Mepitel Film on?

The Mepitel film is water proof however, do not have long hot showers as this will cause the film to come off your skin.

What should I do if the Mepitel Film peels off while I'm at home?

If the Mepitel film begins to roll while you are at home do not peel the rest of it off. Try and leave it in place and it will be fixed on your next treatment day.

What do you do for your skin if you cannot use Mepitel Film?

You will be given moisturising cream to apply daily to the treatment area.

- Apply after your treatment and at bed time
- Do not apply any cream within 4 hours of your next treatment.

You will also need to follow the general skin care advice section during your radiation treatment, on the next page.

General Skin Care During Your Treatment



Wear loose clothing during treatment. A top and bottom is easier to get on and off when changing into a gown for treatment.



Have a quick shower every day. Use warm, rather than hot water.



Use a mild soap such as Dove Sensitive Skin Unscented®, Aveeno Moisturising Bar®, Goat Milk or other unscented soap.



Gently pat dry the treatment area with a clean towel.



You are able to use deodorant during your treatment (unless you have broken skin-speak to the radiation team if you are unsure)



If you have had a mastectomy, wear your soft form only, not the breast prosthesis, as the weight may rub your skin.



Do not shave under your arm with a razor blade. This can cause tiny breaks in the skin and make the area more prone to infection.



Do not wear underwire bras.



Do not apply soap directly to the treatment area, and make sure you rinse well.



Fatigue - Tiredness

To help manage your tiredness during your treatment:

- Try some light exercise when you are feeling least tired during the day
- Keep a diary to see what time of the day you are most tired
- Listen to music/read books
- Meditate or use relaxation exercises
- Spread out and prioritise what you need to get done over the day
- Ask others for help
- During the day, rest when you need to, but not for longer than 45 minutes.

It is important you let your radiation team know if you are having any concerns as soon as possible. It is important for you to keep drinking fluids and eating a nutritional diet during your treatment.

Notes



After radiotherapy



On your last day of treatment a follow-up appointment will be booked with your radiation oncologist in four to six weeks. Any side effects that you have had during your treatment will start to improve around two weeks after your treatment finished.

Last treatment

On completing your last treatment we will:

- Check the Mepitel (if using) is intact and covering the whole breast/chest wall
- Ensure you have moisturiser to apply once the Mepitel is removed
- Ensure you have enough supplies of any dressing you have been using
- Tell you who to contact if you have any skin or other treatment related problems
- Make a follow-up appointment for you with your radiation oncologist.

Skin Care

For the next 2 weeks we need you to look after your skin as you have been during your treatment

Your skin changes can be worse about 10 to 14 days after treatment is finished, your skin usually starts to improve after this time.

If the area is only dry, red or itchy, continue to apply moisturiser several times a day till healed.

If you have the Mepitel film on, it needs to be removed 14 days after your treatment is finished. It is best to remove it under a warm shower.

Apply moisturiser to the area once the film is removed. Apply moisturiser three times a day.

If your skin is broken and there are moist areas, your radiotherapy team will advise you on how to look after the affected skin.

Any redness of the skin has usually improved four to six weeks after finishing your radiotherapy.

Fatigue

The tiredness you may have felt during treatment will improve after a few weeks.

Long term skin care

Always protect the treated skin from the sun and heat.

Use sunscreen (to exposed skin) and cover up.

This area will always be more sensitive and at risk of sun damage even after treatment.

Follow up care appointments

Your first follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist will be our to six weeks after you have finished your treatment. This this will have been booked on your last day of treatment.

During this appointment, side effects you may have had during your treatment (skin, fatigue, arm swelling or tightness) will be discussed to ensure they are improving and being managed. Your skin should be healed and have more energy.

You will be able to discuss concerns and ask any questions.

After this appointment you will need to attend regular follow up reviews. They will be every few months for several years. These are important to make sure everything is going well and to answer any questions you may have.

At these appointments, your breast or chest wall area and your armpits will be checked. You can also talk about any side effects or concerns you may have from your radiotherapy treatment.

You will need a mammogram and/or ultrasound every year for the next 5 years. These will be used to check your breasts or your mastectomy area. Your surgeon will usually arrange this.

Frequently Asked Questions



Will radiation therapy be painful?

While treatment is being delivered, you will not see or feel anything. The delivery of radiation is like having an X-ray or CT scan. You will hear the machine making a buzzing sound.

Will I be 'radioactive'?

No, receiving radiotherapy will not leave you radioactive at any time. It is safe to be with family, children, friends and pregnant women.

Should I take medications and/or vitamins while receiving treatment?

It is important to tell your radiation oncologist all the medicines, supplements and vitamins you are currently taking. Continue to take your prescribed medicines as normal. Some vitamins or supplements could impact on the treatment.

Will I lose my hair?

You will lose your underarm hair, if your underarm is being treated. Radiotherapy only effects the area being treated. You won't lose the hair on your head.

Can I have a flu or tetanus vaccination?

Yes, it is safe to receive these while you are having your treatment.

Where can I park during treatment?

Free parking is available while you are having your treatment. You can park outside the Cancer Care Centre, on New Dapto Road at the Illawarra Cancer Care Centre. You can park at the rear of the Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre. Go to the boom gate and dial the intercom at your first treatment. Please ask staff for more information.

Is there transport available?

There are public transport options available. You would have received this information before your consultation with the radiation oncologist.

There is community transport for those people that have difficulty. There may be a small fee. Please ask staff for more information.

How long will treatment take?

The length (or course) of radiation is based on the specific plan designed for you by your doctor. Generally, you will be in and out of the centre within 30 minutes. Delays may occur on some days.

How much does my treatment cost?

Medicare covers all costs.

Am I able to continue lymphoedema massage during treatment?

Not to the treatment area. Please talk to your Breast Care Nurse or lymphoedema physiotherapist.

Is it a problem if I miss a scheduled treatment?

Radiation treatment is designed to be delivered as small daily treatments to get the best outcome. Once treatment has started it is important that the rest are not delayed or missed. Sometimes medical reasons can cause a treatment to be delayed or missed, your radiation oncologist will discuss this with you.

What should I wear to treatment?

Wear loose fitting cotton clothes. Don't wear clothes that are tight or that may rub the area. Don't wear an underwire bra. Once you arrive, you will be asked to change into a gown in the change room in preparation for treatment.

Can I get the treatment area wet or go swimming during treatment?

Showering / swimming in salt water is fine. Swimming in chlorinated pools is not recommended. Pat the skin dry, do not rub it.

What happens if I lose/gain weight while I'm having my radiotherapy?

The radiation therapists will monitor any changes in your body shape during your treatment. They will take measurements each day. If your body changes too much a new plan may be needed.

What if i need accommodation whilst having treatment?

We have onsite accommodation available at both centres, please ask staff for more information.

Resources



Online resources for additional information about your radiotherapy

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Cancer and Haematology Network (ISCaHN)

http://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/Cancer_Services/

Targeting Cancer

www.targetingcancer.com.au

Cancer Council

www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy.html

BCNA

<https://www.bcna.org.au/>

eviQ Cancer Treatments Online

www.eviq.org.au/eviQNavigationPatientsandCarers.aspx

QUITLINE

13 78 48

www.icanquit.com.au

Programs

Locally run programs for patients undergoing treatment for Breast Cancer in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven:

YWCA Encore

Free 8 week exercise program designed for women who have experienced breast cancer. If you would like to enrol, call 1800 305 150

Look Good Feel Better

Free community service program designed to assist and manage the appearance related side effects of chemotherapy/radiotherapy, call 1800 650 960

CanConquer

Specialist allied health team providing targeted exercise and education for the patient pre, during and post cancer treatment. Please speak to your breast care nurse to find out the referral process of attending CanConquer or call 02 4207 9999 (Illawarra)

Support groups for Breast Cancer

There are a number of locally based support groups in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven area. The full list can be located in the Breast Cancer Resource Directory or alternatively, ask your breast care nurse.

Ask your breast care nurse or treating team member for more information about any of these programs.

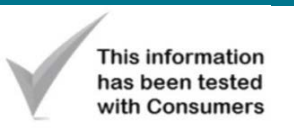
Cancer council information

Cancer Council Information centers are located on Level 2 at the Illawarra Cancer Care Centre and the main foyer at the Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre

There is a range of information and volunteers available to assist at both Illawarra and Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre's.

If you would like to provide feedback on this booklet,
please email it to

ISLHD-ISCAHN@health.nsw.gov.au



Published: August 2018

Updated: March 2019. October 2020

Reference: DT18/34389