

Radiotherapy

Prostate Treatment



Health

Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

Illawarra & Shoalhaven
Cancer Care Centres

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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, prostate cancer specialist nurse, or go to your nearest emergency department out of hours if you have:

- Severe pain in the treatment area
- If you are unable or having difficulty passing urine
- 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
- ☐ Illawarra Prostate Cancer Support Group 0412 397 549
illawarrapcsg@gmail.com
- ☐ Travel & accommodation subsidy (IPTAAS):
If travelling more than 200km per week
www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/services/ipaas
- ☐ 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.

Prostate cancer specialist nurse

Contact: _____

What they do:

A nurse with specialised knowledge of prostate 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:

A specialist who provides psychological assessment and interventions for cancer patients, and where required, to families or 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

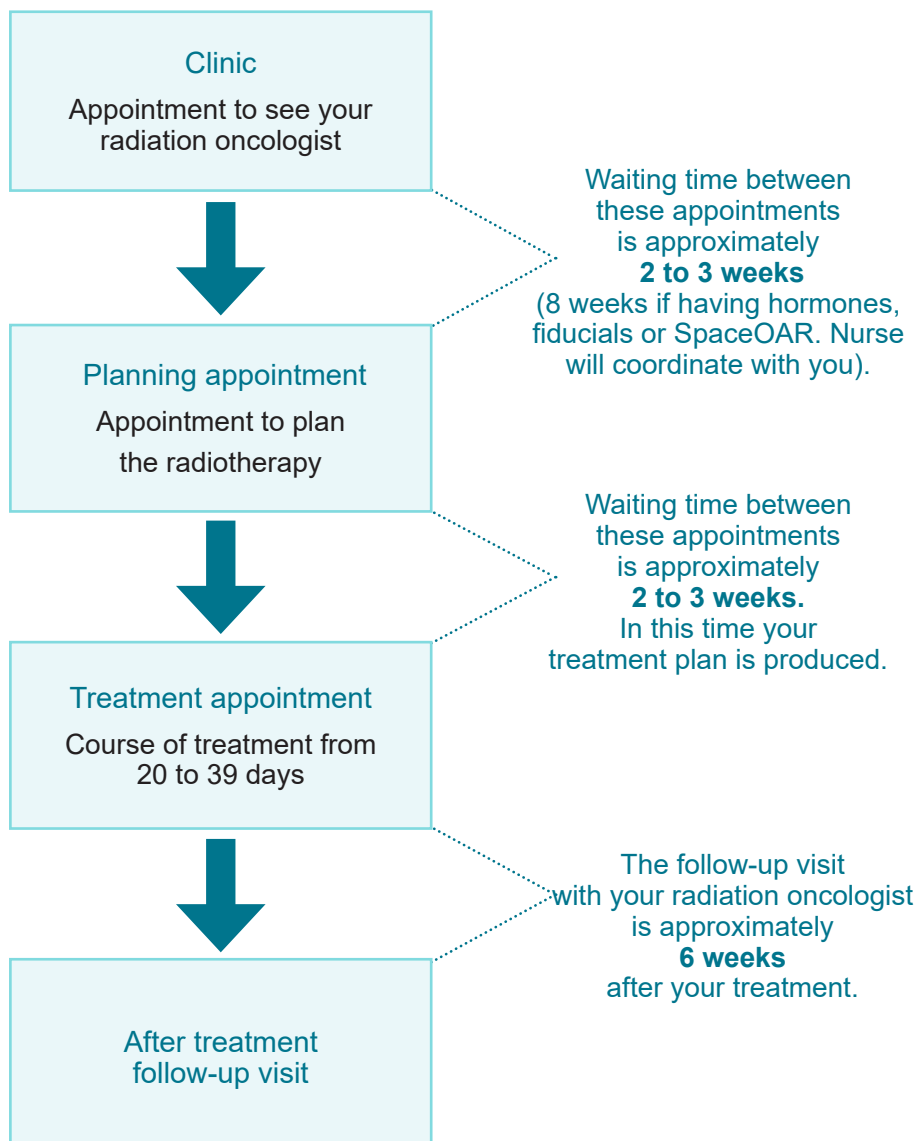
Dietitian

Contact: _____

What they do:

Give you advice on what to eat and help you manage any bowel problems you may be having during your treatment.

Your pathway





Linear accelerator

What is radiotherapy?

A stylized icon representing radiotherapy, featuring a central circle with three radiating lines, enclosed within a larger circle with three concentric arcs on the right side, all in a light blue color.

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; and
- Details about your specific prostate cancer.

Prostate radiotherapy can be the main treatment for the cancer. Sometimes it is also used:

- After surgery, to reduce the risk of the cancer returning
- With hormone treatment, which can improve the results in some people.

Your radiation treatment will be delivered to the pelvic area. This is where the prostate is located. You may be having treatment to your:

- ☐ prostate
- ☐ pelvic nodes

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

What side effects can the treatment cause?

Radiotherapy can cause both short and long term side effects. Short term side effects occur during your radiotherapy treatment. Long term side effects can occur 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

Bladder changes

You may:

- Have some discomfort/burning when you pass urine
- Notice the flow of your urine might seem weaker
- Need to pass urine more often either during the day or at night
- Not have full control when passing urine (less common)
- Have blood in your urine (less common).

Bowel changes

You may:

- Feel the need to pass a bowel motion quickly
- Want to strain, whether or not you actually need to pass a bowel motion
- Have loose bowel motions
- Have a small amount of blood in your motion
- Have a sore or irritated back passage
- Notice that you pass a lot of wind.

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.

Skin

In general, radiation treatment for prostate cancer does not affect the skin. The skin around your back passage may become red and sore.

Hair loss

You will only lose your hair in the treated area. This is usually temporary and it should start to grow back 8-12 weeks after radiotherapy treatment has finished. Sometimes hair loss can be permanent.

Long-term side effects

Most men recover well from their radiation treatment. They do not experience side effects that have a major impact on their quality of life.

Some possible long-term effects include:

Bladder changes

- Bleeding when passing urine
- Difficulty passing urine
- Passing urine more often
- Leakage or less control over your bladder.

Bowel changes

- An increase in the number of bowel motions during the day, usually in the morning
- Blood or mucus in the bowel motion (less common).

Sexual functioning

- Radiotherapy can cause you to not be able to have an erection. This occurs more often if hormone treatment is given with the radiation treatment.
- Most men will be infertile after radiotherapy. If this is a concern, let your radiation oncologist or prostate cancer specialist nurse know. We can talk to you about options like using the sperm bank.

How to prepare for my planning and appointment



Preparing for your planning and treatment appointments aims to improve the accuracy and reduce the side effects of the radiation treatment.

One of the things we need to prepare for your treatment is your bowels.

- We need your **bowels empty** and as little gas as possible for your planning appointment and every day of your treatment
- We will ask you some questions about your bowel habits to help us book your planning and treatment appointment times.

Follow these tips daily to help reduce gas.

You will need to do this:

- 2 days before your planning appointment
- 2 days before your first treatment appointment and throughout the rest of your treatment.

Eat regular meals/snacks

- Do not skip meals
- Avoid long gaps between meals/snacks.
- **Eat slowly**
Chew well with your mouth closed
- Do not talk while you are chewing/eating.

Drink fluid slowly

- Sip rather than gulp
- Try not to eat and drink at the same time.

Drink plenty of water throughout the day before your planning and during your treatment. The recommended amount is 2 to 3 litres per day to

Do some regular gentle activity such as a daily walk.

Avoid the following

- Smoking
- Chewing gum
- Foods or drinks that make you burp a lot
- Avoid fizzy / carbonated drinks (e.g. soft drink, beer, sparkling water)
- Foods that make you feel windy or bloated after you eat them.

Some good tips to help pass wind - try for about one minute

- Sit on the toilet and lean forward so that your knees push onto your chest
- Squat down (hold onto something to keep yourself steady) so your knees are against your belly
- If you are unable to squat, try to bring your knees to your chest while lying down.

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 to 2 hours for this appointment.

Tell the planning radiation therapist when you arrive if:

- **You have not emptied your bowels within 2 to 3 hours of your appointment or,**
- **Your bowel habits have changed since you saw your radiation oncologist.**

When you arrive the radiation therapist will provide information on how to prepare your bladder which is specific to your body (how much water to drink).

You will be given information 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.

During the planning appointment

You will be asked to remove your shoes. You will be given blue socks to put on over your own socks at the beginning of the appointment.

Once you are on the CT scanner bed you will be asked to lower your trousers and underwear so the radiation therapist can see your skin and be able to position you.

Your radiation oncologist may want to give you an injection, this is called contrast. This will help them see the area to be treated on the CT scan, we will talk to you about this on the day of your planning appointment.

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.

CT Scanner with footfix

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 on your back, with your legs and feet on a piece of equipment (called a footfix).





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 pelvis area.

You will need to lie still and breathe normally during this scan.

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

This scan is used to plan your treatment.

When we take the CT scan we will check the size of your bowel and bladder. We may need to ask you to come back another day for the scan if the size of your bowels and bladder are not ideal. This will not happen for everybody.

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.



This is the fridge magnet and the approximate size of the tattoo.

At the end of the appointment we will give you a fridge magnet to remind you of how to prepare for your radiotherapy treatment.

It is very important that you follow these instructions every day of your treatment.

Radiotherapy planning

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

The CT 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.

At the planning appointment you would have been given instructions and a magnet on how to prepare your bowels and bladder for your treatment.

It is very important that you follow these instructions **every** day of your treatment.

If you are unsure about what to do, arrive 1 hour before your appointment and staff can assist you with these instructions.

When you arrive for your appointment you need to have:

- Filled your bladder
- Emptied your bowels.

Please tell radiation therapists when you arrive if:

- You have not been able to empty your bowels before your appointment
- Your bowel habits have changed.

Treatment times

Your treatment time will be booked around your bowel motions, so we can make sure you have empty bowels.

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. **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 therapists as soon as possible so we can try to arrange a better time. This will also need to fit around the timing of your bowel motions.

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

If you are running late or unable to make it to your appointment, please notify the radiation therapists on your treatment machine as soon as possible.

Your first treatment appointment

On your first day please come 15 minutes before your appointment time and 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 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.

One of your treatment radiation therapists 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 to 20 minutes.

The time in the treatment room includes:

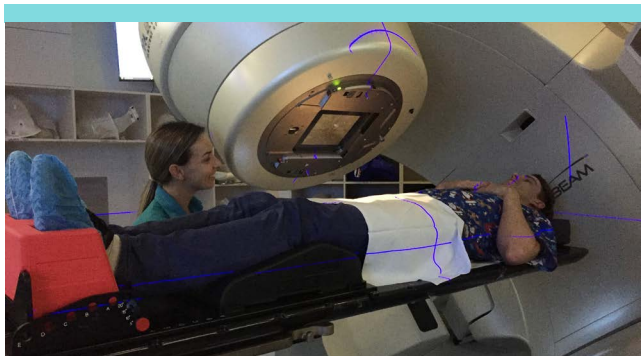
- Getting you into the correct position
- Delivering your treatment
- Helping you in and out of the room.

In the treatment room

The radiation therapists will ask your name, date of birth and treatment area every day. They will put you into the same position using the same equipment used in the planning appointment.

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 if you like.

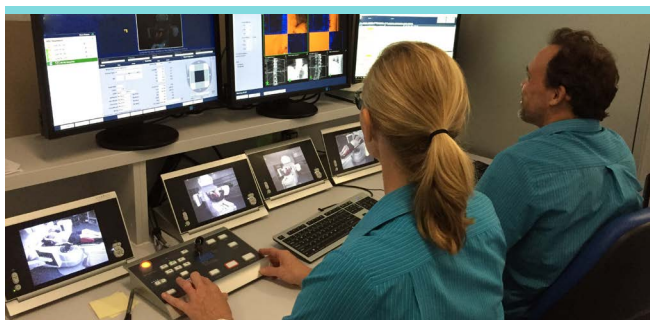
Once you are in the correct position, the radiation therapists will leave the room to start the treatment. We can see and hear you during the treatment (the room has television monitors and an intercom).



Prostate patient on the linear accelerator

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.



Staff outside treatment room checking your position

During your course of radiation treatment

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

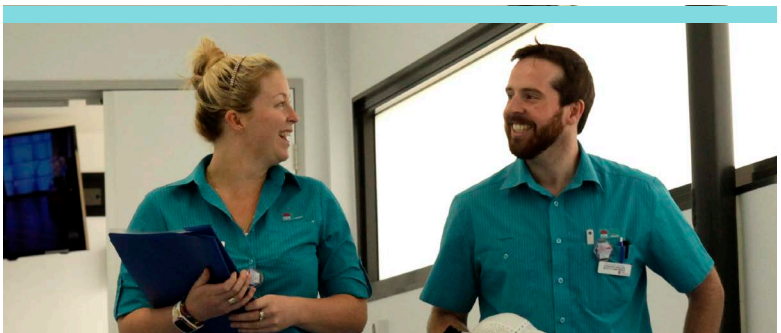
Tell the radiation staff as soon as possible if you are not able to follow these instructions.

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 how treatment is working. If you have fiducials inserted into your prostate, these will show up on the x-rays. We will use these to help us position your treatment fields.

We also check the size of your bowels and bladder. If they are different to the planning appointment we may give you instructions to follow. You may need to wait longer for us to deliver your treatment.

It is important to try and maintain your weight during treatment, any major changes in the shape and size of your body may change our calculations and a new CT scan will be required.

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



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.

If you are unable to or find it hard to pass urine, please urgently contact your radiation oncologist, prostate cancer specialist nurse or your general practitioner during office hours. Out of hours go to the local emergency department.

Please let staff know if you notice any changes in the treatment area as they may be able to help you manage these symptoms. Also please talk to radiation staff before attempting to take any medications for your side effects.

Bladder changes/irritation

- Drink plenty of fluids (daily recommendation is 2 to 3 litres)
- You can start taking Ural if the burning becomes uncomfortable (available from a supermarket or chemist without prescription). Start taking sachets two times a day and increase this to four times a day if needed. Please let your treatment staff know if you are using Ural
- Cranberry juice may also help with discomfort when passing urine.

Bowel changes/irritation

- Avoid or reduce the amount of spicy foods, dairy products, alcohol, fatty foods, high-fibre foods and coffee you eat or drink. These can irritate your bowels
- It is important you drink plenty of fluids (daily recommendation is 2 to 3 litres)
-



Sexual function

- You can keep having sex during and after the treatment. The prostate cancer and the radiation treatment will not harm your partner. Use contraception for the next 12 months if there is a chance that your partner may become pregnant. This is very important as radiotherapy can damage your sperm cells during this time.

Fatigue/tiredness

There are some things you can do to help manage your tiredness during your treatment.

- Do not operate machinery or drive if you are tired
- 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
- Rest when you need to, but not longer than 45 minutes
- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fluids - we can help you with this.

General skin care during your treatment



Wear loose clothing during 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



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



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



Do not apply any oils, colognes, lotions or talcum powders to the treatment area.

After radiotherapy

On your last day of treatment a follow-up appointment will be booked with your radiation oncologist 6 weeks. Any side effects that you have had during your treatment will start to improve around 2 weeks after your treatment has finished.

Last treatment

On completing your last treatment we will:

- Make sure any side effects you are having are being managed
- Tell you who to contact if you have any treatment related problems
- Make a follow-up appointment for you with your radiation oncologist in 4 to 6 weeks after your radiotherapy.

After treatment

Bladder changes

Problems with passing urine after your treatment are not common.

In some cases, radiotherapy may cause a change in urinary function. This might be because your urethra is scarred.

It is important that you let your radiation oncologist know about any concerns you have when emptying your bladder at your follow-up appointment.

Bowel changes

Any diarrhoea or loose bowels should begin to improve within 2 to 6 months of finishing your radiation treatment. Sometimes these symptoms may last for longer than this. They can re-occur at any time after finishing your treatment.

It is important that you let your radiation oncologist know if you are having these problems at your follow-up appointment.

Sexual function

Many men who are sexually active before treatment will be sexually active years after having radiotherapy.

However, around 50% of men may experience some drop in their sexual function. There are treatments such as tablets, injections or implants that can help if you have problems. The prostate cancer specialist nurse is available to talk to you about your concerns.

Fatigue

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

Follow up appointment

Your first follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist will be 6 weeks after you have finished your treatment. This will have been booked on your last day of treatment.

At this appointment:

- Any other side effects that you may be having will be discussed
- Your Prostate-Specific Antigen (often referred to as PSA) will be checked
- You may be asked to have other scans depending on your specific case
- You can also talk about any concerns you may have from your radiotherapy treatment.

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.

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?

Radiotherapy only effects the area being treated. You may have hair loss around the pelvis area. You will not 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 first 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.

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. Do not wear clothes that are tight or that may rub the area. Once you arrive, you will be asked to remove your shoes and put shoe covers on your feet in preparation for treatment.

Resources



Online resources for additional information about your radiotherapy:

Andrology Australia – www.andrologyaustralia.org

Cancer Council – www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/treatment/radiotherapy.html

eviQ Cancer Treatments Online -
www.eviq.org.au/eviQNavigationPatientsandCarers.aspx

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Cancer and Haematology Network (ISCaHN)-
http://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/Cancer_Services/

Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia – www.prostate.org

QUITLINE 137848 www.quitnow.au

Targeting Cancer – www.targetingcancer.com.au

Ask your prostate cancer specialist nurse for more recommended information and resources

Cancer Council information

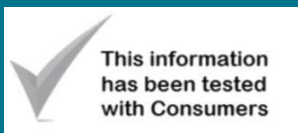
Cancer Council information centers are located on Level 2 at the Illawarra Cancer Care Centre and the main foyer at the Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre

There is a range of information and volunteers available to assist at both centres.

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

ISLHD-ISCAHN@health.nsw.gov.au

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