

Patient initiated follow-up after completing radiotherapy to the pelvis

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This leaflet explains what will happen now that you have completed your treatment.

There is good evidence to show that having regular follow-up appointments does not help prevent cancer returning or identify any new problems. There is strong evidence that symptoms and concerns are addressed more quickly if patients report them as they occur rather than waiting for a routine follow-up appointment. Now that your treatment is complete you will not be seen regularly at the hospital but the team is still there for you if you need them as well as your G.P.

You and your doctor have agreed that you do not need to come to hospital for routine appointments.

The risk that cancer will come back is different for everyone. By having the treatment recommended by your medical team you have minimised your personal risk as much as possible.

Side effects of radiotherapy

People can experience side effects from radiotherapy in the months following treatment or in some cases years later. Some people can experience changes to bladder and bowel function (going to the toilet frequently or needing to go urgently) and difficulties with sexual relationships.

Some people may need to open their bowels more often or experience diarrhoea. If this occurs you can try to manage these problems with diet by reducing your intake of fibre rich foods e.g. fruit, vegetables. Using anti-diarrhoea medications such as loperamide can also help. Pelvic floor exercises can also help. If these measures do not improve your symptoms you should speak to your doctor/nurse for further advice. If you experience leakage from the back passage you should speak to your doctor/nurse.

Needing to pass urine more regularly can also be a problem. If this occurs try to avoid having too many drinks that contain caffeine, fizzy drinks and fruit juices as these can aggravate the symptoms. Try decaffeinated tea, coffee or soft drinks. If you experience incontinence when you laugh or sneeze pelvic floor exercises may help. If this does not improve, your doctor can prescribe medication to help with this.

Radiotherapy to the pelvis can cause discomfort with sexual intercourse. Vaginal moisturisers and lubricants can help. If you experience difficulties please contact your nurse specialist who can provide further advice.

Following treatment for cancer it is normal to experience some worry and anxiety. If you feel that you are not able to move forwards in life please speak to your nurse specialist or G.P. who can refer you for extra support.

If you need to be seen by a doctor or a nurse an appointment can be arranged very quickly or the team may advise you to see your G.P.

When you should contact your G.P. or hospital team

If you experience any of the problems listed below for more than two weeks you should contact you G.P. or hospital team.

- Frequent need to empty your bowels that is impacting on your quality of life
- Difficulty controlling your bowels
- Lower back or pelvic pain that is getting worse
- Bleeding from the vagina, bowel or bladder
- Any unusual lumps in your groin or neck
- Feeling very tired
- Unexplained weight loss
- Breathlessness/persistent cough

Further information about possible treatment side effects can be found in the booklet you have been given from Macmillan: Pelvic Radiotherapy in Women: Possible Late Effects.

This booklet also contains information on other sources of support and advice.

Contact telephone numbers (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm)

Nurse Specialists

0191 4453404

0191 4452123

0191 4456706

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews. Further information is available in the leaflet Disclosure of Confidential Information IL137, via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website or the PALS Service.

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request