



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Managing bladder problems during radiotherapy

Information for patients



The Radiotherapy Department

Bladder problems are common during radiotherapy treatment to the pelvis, as the treatment can irritate the bladder. You may find that you feel the need to pass urine more often, find it difficult to hold on, or feel a burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine. Sometimes you may find it difficult to start the flow of urine or it may stop and start and flow very slowly. Many of these problems can be helped by some simple tips.

Things that you can do:

increase the amount of water you drink every day. You should aim to drink about **2 litres** (about 6 to 8 cups) of fluid each day, most of which should be water. If you are passing urine frequently during the night, you may wish to drink more in the early part of the day and reduce the amount you drink in the evening.

Avoid drinks that may irritate your bladder more. If you do have these drinks, try to have them less often or stop them completely to see if this helps.

Drinks which **may irritate** the bladder are:

- drinks containing caffeine such as coffee, tea, green tea, hot chocolate or cola
- alcohol
- carbonated (fizzy) drinks
- citrus fruit juices (e.g. orange or grapefruit).

Drinks which are thought **not to irritate** the bladder are:

- water (definitely not an irritant)
- caffeine-free tea and coffee
- fruit and herbal teas
- diluted fruit juices (squash)
- milk.

Reduce or give up smoking. This can be difficult at a stressful time, but may help to reduce your symptoms. You can get help to give up smoking. Ask your radiographer or nurse for the 'Radiotherapy: Stopping Smoking – support and advice services' leaflet.

Other things that you can try:

- **Avoid** spicy foods, as these can also irritate the bladder.
- **Avoid** becoming constipated, as this can cause pressure on the bladder. If you find you are becoming constipated, speak to your radiographer or nurse, who can give you some advice on how to manage this.
- Find ways to reduce stress, as this can sometimes increase the need to pass urine.
- Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles to reduce weakness or incontinence. Please ask for a leaflet which describes these exercises.

If you are still experiencing problems or they have got worse, or if you experience any of the symptoms below, please let the radiographers know as soon as you arrive so they can arrange for a healthcare professional to see you:

- blood in your urine
- passing blood clots in your urine
- pain or stinging when passing urine
- straining to start the flow of urine.

We may carry out a urine test to make sure you do not have a bladder infection. We will also discuss the use of painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, which can help reduce the inflammation and irritation caused by your treatment.

There may be other medication that could benefit your symptoms, but this will be discussed with you when you are seen by your specialist radiotherapy nurse or treatment review radiographer. We may give you a 'Macmillan Toilet card' which gives you access to toilets urgently, when you are out.

How to contact us

If you have any queries during your radiotherapy please speak to the therapeutic radiographer treating you, or the specialist radiotherapy nurses.

Tel: **01865 235 472**

(Monday to Friday, 8am - 6.30pm)

Outside of hours, please phone the Oxford Triage Assessment Team on **01865 572 192**.

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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