



## TRANSCRIPT:

### Preparing for radiotherapy Part 3: Brachytherapy

In this video we're going to talk about:

- What it's like having brachytherapy
- The possible side effects of brachytherapy
- And we'll hear perspectives from people who have been through brachytherapy for womb cancer, and their recommendations for how to get through it

Brachytherapy is internal radiotherapy, and it gives a high dose of radiation to the top of the vagina.

Applicators are placed into your vagina and then attached to the brachytherapy machine — the machine then gives a dose of radiation. When the treatment is finished, the applicators are taken out and you can go home.

This treatment is usually given more than once.

#### **[Sarah shares her experience of having brachytherapy and its immediate side effects]**

*I had three sessions of brachytherapy, which were two one week, and one the next week.*

*The radiographers were great. They came in and did a discreet examination to check what size applicator to use. I had a set time that I was in there, and it went like clockwork, and I didn't particularly have to prepare my bladder or bowel in any way.*

*I was in a room, literally for eight to nine minutes while they did the procedure, in a very comfortable room - lying very still on a bed - with a television to watch. It totally surprised me how easy it was.*

I was told about side effects of brachytherapy, about drying of the vagina, and that I might have a little spotting of blood afterwards, which I did have, and I was reassured by the radiographers after the first session that this was quite normal.

#### **[The vagina can become shorter and narrower after brachytherapy. Anne and Sarah discuss how they use dilators to help prevent this.]**

My experience was, I was given this particular dilator by my gynae oncology nurse, and given sachets of a branded lubricant to use, and to use the dilators starting with

whatever's most comfortable for you and maybe progressing a little bit but there was no, sort of, recommended size of applicator that I had to, sort of, stick to. As long as I was using it regularly, that was the best advice I got.

And I think at my first follow-up, I, they asked me if I was using the applicator regularly and I hadn't used it for a little while, and I did get a little bit of spotting when I re-used it, and so I went quickly back to the clinic. They checked me out – there was no problem, but then I am regularly using it as per instructions.

I think I'm perhaps slightly a bit different. So, I did get a hard applicator like this at my follow-up appointment, but I think I just found this very, very hard, and I realised, I think from an online source, somewhere, that perhaps if I was finding that too hard, that I should actually get something like a silicone applicator, a bit like the one here. Except, and I have got this one, but, again, I think I find this one just a bit sore because I find it quite pointed.

So, what I've actually ended up doing is getting a vibrator, because it's got a much rounder, much more rounded top, it's much more comfortable to use, and effectively does the job that the dilator needs to do in terms of preventing the build-up of scar tissue. Certainly, I know the gynae oncology team when I go for my follow-up appointments, they always tell me it all looks fine, it all looks good.

And I think using it, it is easier to use a nice natural lubricant, and I do personally find that just having the silicone is just, just nicer and gentler for what is quite tender tissue down there. So, this is just a way of just being a bit kinder for this ongoing physio that I have to do.

### **[Where can I find further information and support?]**

There's more information about radiotherapy on our website, including a checklist of things to take with you during treatment, put together by our Peaches community. You can also go to our video titled, 'Accessing support and information', and you can find a list of organisations on the website that provide helpful support and information.