



TRANSCRIPT:

Preparing for radiotherapy

Part 2a: What to expect when having external beam radiotherapy

In this video we're going to talk about:

- What it's like having external beam radiotherapy
- And we'll hear perspectives from people who have been through external beam radiotherapy for womb cancer and their recommendations of how to get through it.

External beam radiotherapy is usually given Monday to Friday for a few weeks. You'll be given a weekly schedule, so you will know in advance what time your session will be each day but do ask if you need to reschedule an appointment.

The radiotherapy itself only takes a few minutes, but there's some waiting around time beforehand due to having to drink water to fill your bladder and making sure your lower bowel is empty.

[What's it like having external beam radiotherapy?]

For the external beam radiotherapy, that was 25 sessions — one each weekday for 5 consecutive weeks, which effectively made it like a full-time job for those 5 weeks and, for it to work, I couldn't miss a session.

I had to have some tiny tattoos done at my first planning appointment, so they knew where to line up the machines every time I went. I had three tattoos — one on the left upper thigh, one on the right, and one on the pubic area. This was quite painless but, of course, they become permanent.

Having the treatment itself is quite painless. You just lie down, and the radiographers check that you are positioned exactly as they want you to lie, so the X-ray beam is applied precisely to the area being treated. And this is the hardest bit in the few minutes while the treatment lasts — lying exactly still in that position — but you don't feel anything while that's happening.

The radiographers can't be with you in the room when the machine is on, but they can see and hear you, and you can talk to them if you need to.

[What preparation do you need to do before external beam radiotherapy?]

It's like a full-time job because you're not just at the hospital for the few minutes you're having the treatment, but because I also had to do prep for about an hour beforehand — taking an enema to ensure my bowel was clear, and therefore shrunk as much as possible, and drinking a certain amount of water so that my bladder was completely full and most of it out of the way of the beam by the exact time I was having my treatment. You're absolutely desperate to spend a penny by the time the treatment finishes!

The radiographers would tell me exactly how much to drink and what time to start drinking each day. Both of these steps were really important to minimise the radiation exposure to my bowel and bladder and any lasting effects from the treatment.

I did have quite a few challenges over the gas, or wind, in my bowels. This can affect where the beams hit, so it's very important that you try to minimise the amount you have. The radiotherapy team were amazing, asking what I'd eaten maybe that day, or the night before, to try and work out what was causing the gas.

I also used to walk in the gardens at the hospital just to make sure that I didn't have as much gas in my bowel as maybe there would have been if I hadn't have walked about. I got into a routine in the end which helped.

[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