

- It may slow down the growth of the cancer in the area that is treated.
- Treatment works quite quickly. Within a few weeks you should have some pain relief.
- You may be able to reduce the dose of any pain-relieving drugs you might be taking.

Disadvantages

- Like most treatments, palliative radiotherapy may cause side effects (see pages 4-5).
- You may experience an increase in pain during, and for a few days after, treatment but this should soon improve.
- The pain may come back after several months. If this happens you may need further treatment.

The specialist who treats cancer with radiotherapy is called a clinical oncologist. They should discuss with you whether you will benefit from palliative radiotherapy, which type of radiotherapy you may have, how long the treatment may take and possible side effects.

External beam radiotherapy (EBRT)

External beam radiotherapy (EBRT) is a short course of radiotherapy that is an effective and common way of relieving pain from bone metastases. During EBRT, high energy X-ray beams are directed at the area of pain from outside of the body.

It may be a week or more after treatment before your pain starts to improve. It usually takes a few weeks for treatment to have its full effect. Pain relief usually lasts for an average of four to six months, but this can vary from person to person. Around seven out of ten men (70 per cent) will get some pain relief from this treatment.

If you have pain in several areas of your body, you may benefit from having a treatment called hemi-body radiotherapy. This is radiotherapy to the upper half or the lower half of your body, depending on where you have pain. Your specialist team will assess your general health and fitness for this treatment, as it can be quite tiring. Hemi-body radiotherapy is carried out in the same way as EBRT.

What does treatment involve?

Preparing for external beam radiotherapy

Before starting EBRT you will go to a planning session. You may have a CT (computerised tomography) scan so that your specialist team can find the correct position for your treatment. You may then be given small permanent marks (a type of tattoo) on the area to be treated. You will barely be able to see them but they help the staff to put you in the right position on the radiotherapy table each time you are treated. You may also have a practice run (simulation) of the procedure. This uses low energy x-rays. The practice run helps to make sure that the correct area is treated. Planning is very important, and you may have several sessions to plan your treatment properly.

Treatment with EBRT

You will have your treatment in the outpatient radiotherapy department at the hospital. This means that you will not need to stay overnight. You may have either one single dose or a series of smaller doses spread out over a week or more. If you are having more than one dose, you may have a dose every day, every few days or once a week until you complete your course.

At the beginning of each treatment a member of staff will help move you into the right position on the table, using the marks on your body as a guide. The staff will then leave the room but they will be able to see you at all times through cameras. The radiotherapy machine moves around your body and will make a slight noise. It does not touch you and you will not feel anything. You will need to lie still but the treatment only lasts a few minutes. You should be able to go home after the treatment has finished.

Radiotherapy for MSCC

If you are having radiotherapy to treat metastatic spinal cord compression (MSCC) you will need treatment quite quickly. The quicker you have treatment, the more effective it will be. This means that you will only have a short time to discuss your treatment with your specialist team and the planning session will take place just before you have your treatment. You may also have steroids before radiotherapy to reduce

These may include:

- Using a toilet that can flush rather than a urinal, and flushing the toilet twice after use.
- Wiping away any urine or blood spills with a tissue and then flushing it down the toilet.
- Washing your clothes or bed covers separately from other laundry if you get urine or blood on them.
- If you leak urine (incontinence) you may need to have a catheter for two weeks after having the injection of strontium-89. A catheter is a small tube inserted through the penis to drain urine from the bladder. This will help to prevent any leaking of urine.

Strontium-89 will stay in the bones for several months and continue to deliver radiotherapy to the cancer cells. Any strontium-89 that is not taken up by the bones will be gone from your urine and blood within a few days.

What are the side effects?

Most side effects of strontium-89 only last a short time and are not severe. They may include:

- An increase in pain a few days after treatment, but this should only last for a few days.
- Changes to the way your blood clots and an increased risk of infection and anaemia. You may get a fever, chills, bruising, bleeding or tiredness. It is rare for infection or anaemia to be severe, but you may have regular blood tests after treatment.
- Feeling or being sick (nausea or vomiting) or diarrhoea. This is not common.

If you have treatment with strontium-89, you may not be able to have treatment with chemotherapy in the future if your pain returns. This is because strontium-89 affects your bone marrow. There will usually be another treatment that you can have.

What happens afterwards?

Your specialist team will monitor you and your symptoms. The pain can sometimes get worse during treatment and for a few days afterwards. This is called a pain flare. This should soon get better, but you may need to take some pain-relieving drugs during this time or your doctor may increase the dose that you are already taking.

You should notice that the pain gradually improves. It may take a few weeks for the treatment to be most effective. The pain relief usually lasts for several months and you may be able to reduce the dose of any pain-relieving drugs you are taking. Speak to your specialist team or GP about this, as it should not be done suddenly.

If your pain or symptoms do not improve then talk to your specialist team. If your pain has come back, your specialist team may suggest another course of radiotherapy. If you have already had EBRT to one area, you may be able to have another course of EBRT to the same area. This will depend on the dose you have already had. If you have a lot of bone pain in many new areas, you may be able to have hemi-body radiotherapy or treatment with strontium-89. However, you will not be able to have hemi-body radiotherapy twice to the same half of your body because of possible side effects. If you have had treatment with strontium-89 you may be able to have another course of strontium-89.

If more radiotherapy is not possible there will usually be other treatments that can help reduce or control any symptoms you have. Speak to your specialist team about your options. There is more information in our Tool Kit fact sheet, **Pain and advanced prostate cancer**. You can also speak to one of our specialist nurses by calling our confidential Helpline on 0800 074 8383.

Where can I get support?

As well as getting medical help to treat your pain, most men find it helps to get some emotional support. Feeling more in control of your emotions can help you feel better.

If you are feeling low or anxious, it may be useful to talk to a counsellor. Counselling can help you cope if you are experiencing pain. You may be able to get a referral to a counsellor through your specialist team or GP.

More information

The Prostate Cancer Charity

This fact sheet is part of the Tool Kit. Call our confidential Helpline on **0800 074 8383** or visit our website at **www.prostate-cancer.org.uk** for more Tool Kit fact sheets, including an **A-Z of medical words** which explains some of the words and phrases used in this sheet.

CancerHelp UK

www.cancerhelp.org.uk
Freephone: 0808 800 4040
9am-5pm, Mon-Fri
CancerHelp is the patient information website of Cancer Research UK and provides information about living with cancer.

Healthtalkonline

www.healthtalkonline.org
Watch, listen to or read personal experiences of men with prostate cancer and other medical conditions.

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk
Freephone: 0808 808 00 00
9am-8pm, Mon-Fri
Practical, emotional and financial support for people with cancer, their family and friends.

Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres

www.maggiescentres.org
Telephone: 0300 123 1801
Cancer information and support centres located around the UK where people affected by cancer can drop in to access information and support services.

Marie Curie Cancer Care

www.mariecurie.org.uk
Freephone: 0800 716 146
9am-5.30pm, Mon-Fri
Marie Curie run hospice centres throughout the UK and provide a nursing service for patients in their own home day and night, free of charge.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk
Provides medical information and advice, including information about prostate cancer and radiotherapy.

Pain Concern

www.painconcern.org.uk
Helpline: 0844 499 4676
10am-4pm, Mon-Fri
Offers information and support for people with pain and those who care for them.

UK Prostate Link

www.prostate-link.org.uk
The UK Prostate Link website helps you find and compare reliable online information about all aspects of prostate cancer.


The Prostate Cancer Charity makes every effort to make sure that its services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about prostate cancer. We hope that these will add to the medical advice you have had and will help you to make any decisions you may face. Please contact your doctor if you are worried about any medical issues.

The Prostate Cancer Charity funds research into the causes of, and treatments for, prostate cancer. We also provide support and information to anyone concerned about prostate cancer. We rely on charitable donations to continue this work. If you would like to make a donation, please call us on 020 8222 7666.

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Email: scotland@prostate-cancer.org.uk
Telephone: 0141 314 0050

Website: www.prostate-cancer.org.uk

	Confidential Helpline 0800 074 8383* Mon - Fri 10am - 4pm, Wed 7pm - 9pm
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Email: helpline@prostate-cancer.org.uk

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Tell us what you think

We hope you have found this information useful. If you have any comments or suggestions about any of our publications, you can email literature@prostate-cancer.org.uk or write to The Information Team at The Prostate Cancer Charity, 100 Cambridge Grove, London W6 0LE

References to sources of information used in the production of this fact sheet are available on our website.

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