

Contacts

If you are unable to keep any appointments, or have any questions concerning your appointment, please telephone the Wellington Blood & Cancer Centre as soon as possible.

Radiation Treatment Department
Level 2
Wellington Blood & Cancer Centre
Wellington Regional Hospital
Private Bag 7902
Riddiford St
Newtown
Telephone: 04 806 2000

Monday - Friday: 8am – 4:30pm

Brachytherapy Suite: 04 806 2024

5 North Ward oncology nurses are available for **urgent after hours advice** related to your treatment. This is after 4:30pm and on weekends. **Please call: 04 806 0418**

Information for Patients Receiving Vaginal Brachytherapy

Radiation Treatment Department

Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre

Introduction

Your doctor has recommended a course of brachytherapy as part of your treatment. This booklet will give you information about:

- What is brachytherapy?
- Who will I meet?
- What will my brachytherapy treatment involve?
- Possible side effects
- Parking, accommodation and transport to the hospital
- What will happen after treatment?

Treatment is given in the Radiation Treatment Department at the Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre on level 2 of Wellington Hospital. Please report to reception and a radiation therapist will escort you to the brachytherapy treatment room.

Support Services

Please ask a member of your treatment team if you would like more information or to access any of these services.

- Cancer Society
- Counselling (general / relationship / sexual issues)
- Social work
- Support groups
- Massage
- Fit for Life
- Chaplains
- Pacific Health

What is Brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is the use of specialised radiation to treat cancer. For this treatment, radiation is delivered close to or inside the tumour site by a radiation source contained within special applicators.

The advantage of brachytherapy is that radiation doses do not need to pass through the body from outside, like external beam radiation therapy does. The radiation is therefore confined much more closely to the treatment area and allows a higher dose of radiation to be given to the cancer with less damage to normal surrounding tissues. Treatment plans are designed to suit your individual needs. Up to four treatments can be given once or twice a week.

Your doctor will tell you how many treatments you require. Brachytherapy may be given alone or in combination with external beam radiation therapy.

Who will I meet?

Radiation Oncologist: A Radiation Oncologist is a doctor who has specialised in looking after patients with cancer, in particular, involving the use of radiation therapy. Your Radiation Oncologist decides whether brachytherapy is required, how it should be delivered as well as the number of treatments needed.

Radiation Oncology Registrar: A Radiation Oncology Registrar is a doctor who is currently training to become a specialist. The Registrar works closely with your Radiation Oncologist.

Radiation Therapist: Radiation therapists are involved at each stage of your treatment. They organise your appointments and will meet you before your planning session to explain the process. The radiation therapists also plan and deliver your radiation treatment.

Medical Physicist: Medical Physicists are involved in maintaining the brachytherapy machines and work with the doctors and radiation therapists to achieve the best treatment plan for you.

Tiredness

Some people experience tiredness towards the end of their treatment. This can be caused by a number of factors – travelling to and from treatment, change in routine, other treatment you've had recently and the brachytherapy treatment itself. You may require a nap in the afternoon or to take time off work. Please let your treatment team know if you are tired or are having trouble sleeping. If your sleeplessness is caused by anxiety then the Cancer Society may be able to help with counselling.

What will Happen After Treatment?

Reactions usually peak about 1-2 weeks after treatment. Most people find these start to resolve 3-6 weeks after treatment. A follow-up appointment with the doctor will be given to you. You will also be provided with a vaginal dilator to use after treatment.

Smoking

We strongly advise you to stop smoking. You may find this very difficult. Please speak to your treatment team about support available to help with this.

Vaginal Reactions

During treatment, the tissues in the vagina can become pink and inflamed. Your vagina may feel tender, dry or bleed easily. Please let your treatment team know if you are experiencing problems with this.

As the irritation heals, scar tissue can cause your vagina to become less elastic, shorter, narrower or to close. To help prevent this from happening you can use vaginal dilators. A dilator is like a plastic tampon that comes in four sizes. These are designed to be inserted into the vagina to keep it healthy and supple and to reduce the risk of scarring and shortening/narrowing.

One of the Radiation Therapists will provide you with a set of vaginal dilators and explain how to use them.

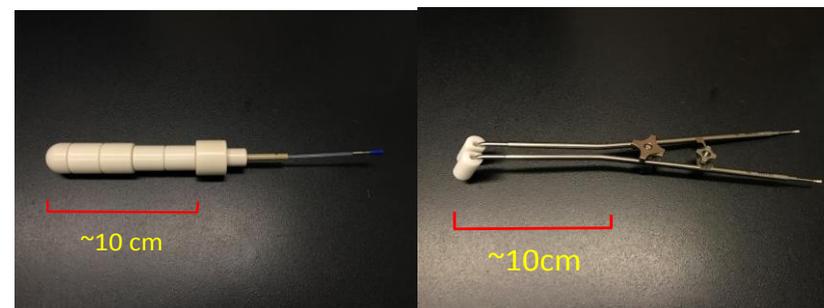
General Advice

- Personal hygiene is important so please bathe or shower regularly. Use a soft towel and pat the skin dry rather than rubbing it. You can continue using your usual soap/shower gel.
- Wear loose cotton or silk underwear. Natural fibres are usually better tolerated.
- Do not use talcum powder in the groin area.
- Do not go in a swimming or spa pool until your reactions have completely settled.

What will my brachytherapy treatment involve?

Planning

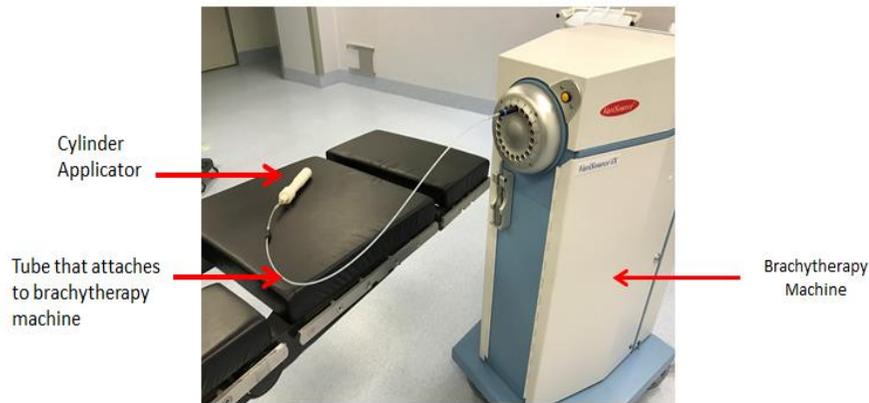
Before your first treatment, you will attend a planning session. At this appointment an applicator will be made up for you and a CT scan will be taken with the applicator positioned inside your vagina. Your Radiation Oncologist will examine you and decide the best applicator for your treatment. The pictures below are of the two different applicators.



You will be provided with all your treatment appointments at your planning session. A treatment plan will then be designed for your specific needs.

Treatment

You will be awake during your brachytherapy treatments, lying on a bed with your feet elevated in stirrups. The applicator is positioned inside your vagina and held in place by a clamp attached to the bed. The applicator is then attached to the brachytherapy machine by a thin tube.



The treatment team will leave the room while the treatment is being delivered but they will be watching you on CCTV cameras at all times.

The radioactive source then travels down the tube into the applicator. You will not feel any sensation from the radiation while the treatment is being delivered.

The treatment itself will take approximately 10 minutes but the whole procedure (including inserting and removing the applicator) will take about one hour.

After the treatment is completed, a radiation therapist will confirm that the radiation levels have returned to normal. The applicator will be removed and you will be able to leave the department immediately. You will **not** be radioactive after the treatment and you will be able to have contact with people as normal.

Possible Side Effects

Treatment is generally well tolerated. Please inform your treatment team if you notice any of the following:

Urinary Symptoms

Your bladder may become irritated as a result of the treatment. Reactions may include:

- Urinating more often (this may be more noticeable at night)
- Stinging or burning while urinating
- Difficulty urinating

If you are experiencing these symptoms there are ways you can help:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Drinking cranberry juice can help

Bowel Irritation

It is common for patients having this treatment to notice changes in their bowel habits. You may become constipated or more commonly, your bowel motions may become looser. Your treatment team can offer you advice if you are experiencing bowel symptoms.