

# Radiation Therapy Bone Pain



**About the Radiation Oncology Team:** Radiation oncologists are the doctors who oversee the care of people undergoing radiation treatment. Other members involved in the radiation oncology team include radiation therapists, radiation oncology nurses, medical physicists, dosimetrists, social workers, dietitians and communication clerks.

**Understanding Radiation Therapy:** Radiation therapy is used to kill tumours, control tumour growth or to relieve symptoms. Radiation works within tumour cells by damaging their ability to multiply. When these cells die, the body naturally eliminates them. Healthy cells in the treated area will be affected by the radiation, but, unlike cancerous cells, they are able to heal themselves.

## **Medical Imaging:**

During a course of radiation, medical imaging (similar to x-ray or CT scans) will be used by your radiation oncology team to ensure you are in the correct position. These images may also be used for clinical development and/or to aid in the education of health care team members within Radiation Oncology. Your personal health information will be protected according to the Personal Health Information Act of Manitoba.

**Relief From Bone Pain:** You can experience some pain relief after one week of radiation treatment; however the treatment may take longer to have effect. Typically some effect is apparent 3 weeks after treatment.

**Possible Side Effects:** Radiation affects each person differently. Radiation only affects the area being treated. The side effects from radiation can include:

- **Fatigue:** Is a daily lack of energy; a feeling of tiredness, weakness or exhaustion. It may come on suddenly and it does not result from activity or exertion. It usually starts during your second to third week of radiation treatments and progresses as the treatments continue. Fatigue will usually subside within eight to twelve weeks after your last day of treatment.
  - **Skin Reaction (Erythema):** The skin may start to become pink or tanned in the treated area, resembling sunburn. It may also become dry and itchy.
  - **Pain / Swelling:** You may experience an increase in tenderness, discomfort and / or pain in the area that is being treated. This usually happens within 24-48 hours after the first treatment. Therefore, it is important that you continue to take your pain medication as prescribed. The pain increase is temporary and will begin to subside after a few days. Note: At this time you may experience constipation from your pain medication. Please notify your radiation therapist if this becomes a problem.
  - **Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and Vomiting:** May occur if the treatment area for your bone pain is near your stomach, small intestine or colon. Your risk for nausea and vomiting depends on how much radiation you are getting and how much of your body is in the treatment area. If your radiation treatment causes you to feel nauseated, it usually occurs a few hours after your treatment. Your radiation oncologist may prescribe drugs called anti-emetics (anti-nausea) to help you cope or to prevent this from happening.
  - **Other Potential Side Effects Related to Your Radiation Treatment:**
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If you experience any of these side effects, inform a health care professional (radiation oncologist, nurse or radiation therapist).

Most of these side effects will begin to heal within two to four weeks after your radiation treatments are complete and it may take up to six to eight weeks for them to go away. Late side effects may begin six months after radiation therapy is over. Late side effects will vary depending on the area that was treated and the radiation dose received. Everyone reacts to radiation differently and every patient's healing process is not the same. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the late side effects, please ask your radiation oncologist.

### **Caring For Yourself During Treatment:**

It is important to take care of yourself while you are having treatment. Here are some helpful hints that will aid in treating and coping with the side effects of treatment.

- Rest when required and eat a well balanced diet. This will increase your energy level and help repair healthy tissue. If you are losing weight, eating foods that are high in protein and calories may help to maintain your weight. If you are experiencing ongoing weight loss, ask to see a dietitian.
- If you are experiencing nausea and / or vomiting, try having several small meals a day and eat slowly. Try eating foods that are cold or at room temperature, bland and / or starchy foods (i.e. crackers or toast).
- If you are experiencing diarrhea or abdominal cramping, limit foods that are high in fat and high fiber. Spicy foods should also be limited. Inform your health care professional as they can give you tips that will help control your diarrhea and / or abdominal cramping.
- Drink 8-10 (237 mL / 8 oz.) glasses of fluids per day.
- Begin recommended skin care on the first day of radiation treatments and continue until the skin reaction has healed. Skin reactions in the treatment area may continue to develop for approximately two weeks after your last treatment.

### **Skin Care:**

- Report any rash or break in the skin to your therapist or nurse. Prevent infection with good hand washing and skin care.
- Use a *\*gentle soap* (e.g. Dove).
- Use *\*unscented lotions* (e.g. Glaxal Base or Lubriderm cream) on the area of treatment two to three times per day. (If the skin breaks open, refrain from using skin products and report to a radiation therapist, nurse or radiation oncologist as soon as possible).
- When bathing, do not scrub. Use clean washcloths.
- Wear loose cotton clothing over the treatment area.
- Protect the treatment area from sun and wind. Do not expose treatment area to sun during treatment and after treatment until reactions have subsided. Once reactions have subsided, use a high factor sunblock to protect your skin.
- Do not use any icepacks, heating pads or hot water bottles in the treatment area.
- Do not use any scented soaps, powders or cosmetics in the treatment area.
- Do not scratch. Avoid any friction in the affected area.
- Avoid smoking - smoking interferes with the healing and increases itching.

*\* We recommend that you have these items at home for use for the duration of your radiation treatments.*

**Support:**

At CCMB we have many different support systems available to you. If you have not received a “Patient & Family Information Guide”, please let your radiation therapist know. This booklet outlines many of the support systems to help you during this period in your life (listed below). If you have interest in any of these services or want a referral, please ask your health care professional or contact the phone numbers provided.

- Dietitian
- Guardian Angel Room
- Patient & Family Resource Centre
- Lennox Bell Lodge (for out of town patients), phone: 204-787-4271
- Volunteer Driver Program (for city residents), phone: 1-800-263-6750
- Patient Representative
- Sexuality Counselor
- Psychosocial Services
- Spiritual Health Specialist

**Medical Contact Information:**

Medical issues during treatment hours: Contact 204-787-2252 or 204-787-2180.

Urgent medical issues after hours or weekends: Contact the radiation oncologist on-call: 204-787-2071.

Emergencies: Go directly to your closest Emergency Department, or dial 911.