

Radiation Therapy Spine SBRT Information

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, dieticians 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.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: Make sure that you take all of your usual pain / anti-anxiety medication before your Simulation and all treatment appointments. We **STRONGLY** suggest that you also take additional “break through” pain medication as you will have to lie very still on your back for 20-30 minutes. We ask that you also bring all of your medications with you.

If prior to your 1st appointment you have any questions / concerns please contact the clinic nurse.



Possible Side Effects: Radiation affects each person differently, and will vary depending on the level of vertebrae treated. Radiation only affects the area being treated. The side effects from radiation can include:

- **Fatigue:** 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 the latter half of your treatment course 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 24-48 hours after the first treatment. Therefore it is important that you take your pain medications as prescribed. The pain increase is temporary and will begin to subside after a few days. Note: At this time you may also experience constipation from your pain medication. Please notify your radiation therapist or clinic nurse if this becomes a problem.

- **Difficulty Swallowing:** If the esophagus, the muscular tube that carries the food to the stomach, is in the treatment field you may develop painful swallowing or a feeling of food being “stuck” while eating or drinking. It may also be associated with a feeling of pain in your chest.
- **Nausea and Vomiting:** If you are having treatment to the mid-spine level, part of your stomach may be in the treatment field. If so, radiation may cause you to feel nauseated or feel sick to your stomach. There are drugs that can be prescribed which can help cope or prevent this from happening. Please notify your radiation therapist, clinic nurse or radiation oncologist if this is a concern.
- **Spine:** There is a small chance of a fracture or collapse of the vertebral body (spine) that is treated. This may cause no symptoms at all or worsening pain. Sometimes numbness or weakness results. In most cases, the radiation oncologist will treat your symptoms with medications. In rare cases, surgery may be required to repair a fracture.
- **Nervous System:** There is a small chance of muscle weakness, numbness, or shooting pain due to irritation of the spinal cord or surrounding nerves after radiation. This can happen up to 18 months after treatment and the symptoms may come on suddenly or slowly. Discuss any concerns with your nurse or radiation oncologist. Often these symptoms are caused by the tumour and you may already have this before radiation is given.

If you experience any of these side effects, inform a health care professional (radiation oncologist, nurse or radiation therapist). Any sudden change in pain, numbness or weakness should be reported to CancerCare staff immediately.

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 dietician.
- If you have difficulty swallowing, eat foods that are moist and soft (e.g. cottage cheese, yogurt milkshakes, puddings, casseroles, scrambled eggs, meats and cooked vegetables in sauces and gravies). Avoid eating foods that are coarse (e.g. crackers and toast), foods high in acidity (e.g. some juices, tomatoes, alcoholic beverages) and spicy foods.
- If you are experiencing nausea and / or vomiting, eat while sitting upright and try having several small meals a day and eat slowly. Try eating foods that are cool or at room temperature, bland and / or starchy foods (e.g. rice, bananas). Gravol® is the only medication for nausea that is available from your local pharmacist without a prescription. There are other medications available, but with a prescription only. Be sure to talk with your physician about any nausea you are feeling.
- 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 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.
- When bathing, use a clean washcloth and do not scrub treatment area. Pat skin to dry, using a soft towel.
- Wear loose cotton clothing over the treatment area.
- During treatment protect area from sun and wind. Do not expose treatment area to sun during treatment and after treatment until reactions have subsided and then use a high factor sun block.
- Sunbathing and use of tanning beds are NEVER recommended for any person at any time.
- Do not use any sunscreen, scented soaps, powders, icepacks, heating pads or hot water bottles in the treatment area until radiation course is entirely completed, and all skin reactions have healed.
- Do not scratch. Avoid any friction in the affected area.
- Avoid smoking — smoking interferes with health and increases itching.
- Avoid hot tubs, saunas and tanning booths.
- * We recommend that you have these items at home for use for the duration of your radiation treatments.

During Treatment: During treatment, you must lie very still and breathe normally. The machine will move around you and will not touch you. The treatment radiation therapists will be watching you the whole time. Treatments generally take about 30 minutes.

After Treatment: After your treatment, you are able to go home almost immediately. There is virtually no recovery time. We ask that someone escort you for your treatment.

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.