



How to take care of yourself while receiving stereotactic radiation therapy to the lung

Introduction

Radiation therapy is the use of special X-rays to treat cancer. These X-rays kill cancer cells. But they can also temporarily affect healthy cells. This can cause side effects on the area of the body that is treated. Side effects differ for each person. They depend on the area of the body being treated, the type of radiation used, the dose of radiation and your general health.

This information is to help you to know what side effects you may have. It will also tell you what to do to help reduce or manage side effects.

Your doctor will follow up with you during the course of your radiation therapy. It can be in person or by phone. Your technologist will give you your treatment every day. You can also ask to speak with a nurse. Ask any member of the team (doctor, technologist or nurse) if you have any questions.

What is stereotactic radiation therapy?

This is a more precise type of radiation therapy. It can only be used for some type of tumors that are small in size. The doctor targets a specific area in your lung. This means that there are fewer side effects than with regular radiation therapy.

The treatment happens over 2 weeks or less. It can be given in 1 to 5 sessions. The sessions are given daily or every other day. Each session lasts about 45 minutes.

Before each treatment, a scan will be done while you are on the treatment table. The goal is to ensure you are in the proper position for treatment.

After the end of the treatment, you will have a follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist in 8 to 12 weeks.

What side effects can I expect?

(1) Fatigue

- Fatigue, or feeling tired, is the main side effect you can have. This can happen during the treatment and last for many weeks after the last treatment.
- It is different than normal feelings of tiredness. It does not get better just by resting.
- What can I do if I have fatigue?
 - Try to remain as active as possible. This is the best way to fight fatigue. Walking is a good example of a way to stay active.

- However, listen to your body. You may have to reduce your activities and rest sometimes.
- If you need to nap, limit this to 30 minutes, early in the afternoon. Long naps can make it hard to sleep at night.

(2) Esophagitis

- Esophagitis is an inflammation (swelling) of the esophagus, the tube that goes from your throat to your stomach. This can make it hard or painful to swallow and may cause you to eat or drink less. Esophagitis does not happen often, but if it does, it can start up to 2 weeks after your last treatment.
- If you have any of these symptoms, tell your technologist, doctor or nurse.

(3) Pneumonitis

- Pneumonitis is an inflammation (swelling) of the lungs. It can happen 30 days to 1 year after the treatment is done.
- You may have some of the symptoms below:
 - New or worse cough.
 - New or worse shortness of breath.
 - Pain in your chest.
 - Fever (101°F or 38.3°C or higher).
 - Increase in fatigue, which makes it hard to do your daily activities.
- If you have any of these symptoms, follow the steps in **What should I do if I feel very sick or there is an emergency?** on page 4.
- Most of these symptoms will get better with medication.

(4) Chest Wall (Thorax) Pain

- This is a rare side effect caused by inflammation (swelling) of the nerves next to the ribs. It can happen 30 days to 1 year after the treatment.
- You may have some of the symptoms below:
 - Pain in the area that was treated (chest or ribs).
 - Pain when carrying heavy objects or taking deep breaths.
- If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor or go to the emergency if the pain is severe.
- Most of these symptoms will get better with medication.

What can I do if I feel overwhelmed?

It is normal to feel many different emotions as you start a new cancer treatment. You can feel worried, angry, sad, numb or okay. These feelings can change over time.

What can I do to help myself?

- Talk with someone you trust.
- Talk with your doctor, technologist or nurse.
- Take part in Cedars CanSupport virtual support programs.
 - For information, call 514-934-1934 ext. 35297 or email cedarscansupport@muhc.mcgill.ca.
- If these feelings make it hard to get through your day or to sleep at night, or if you feel very alone, tell your doctor, technologist or nurse. If needed, you can be referred to a social worker or the Psychosocial Oncology Program for help.

Where can I get more information?

If you want more information, the internet can be a way to get it. However, not all information found on the internet is accurate. You can visit these reliable websites:

cancer.ca — Canadian Cancer Society

fqc.qc.ca — Quebec Cancer Foundation

cansupport.ca/cancer-online-information — Cedars CanSupport, information by subject

cancer.net — American Society of Clinical Oncology

cancer.gov — National Cancer Institute

You can also contact the Cedars CanSupport Resource Centre by phone at 514-934-1934 ext. 31666 or by email at cedarscansupport@muhc.mcgill.ca.

What should I do if I feel very sick or there is an emergency?

If you have an urgent issue that is causing you to worry in between hospital visits:

- Weekdays from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM:
 - Call 514-934-1934 ext. 43400 to talk with a nurse
- Evenings from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM and weekends or holidays from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM:
 - Call 514-934-1934 to speak with the operator
 - Listen to the options and press the number for the operator
 - Ask for the radiation oncology resident on call

If your symptoms are very severe or you are unable to reach someone, go to the emergency department of the nearest hospital. Tell the doctor that you are receiving radiation therapy.

IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ

Information provided is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instructions of a professional healthcare practitioner or to substitute for medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.

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