

# Radiation Therapy

## Liver 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, 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.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** Make sure that you take all of your pain / anti-anxiety medication before your simulation and all treatment appointments. We strongly recommend that you also take additional "break through" pain medication as you will have to lie very still on your back for 30 minutes. If prior to your first 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 area being 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 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 the last day of treatment.
- **Skin Reaction (Erythema):** The skin may start to become pink or tanned in the treated area. It may also become dry and itchy.
- **Pain / Swelling:** You may experience an increase in tenderness, discomfort and / or pain in the area 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 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:** Part of your stomach and or bowels 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 you cope or prevent this from happening. Please notify your radiation therapist, clinic nurse or radiation oncologist if this is a concern.
- **Bloating, Gas and Diarrhea:** If the bowels are in the treatment area, you may experience some bloating and or diarrhea. There are drugs that can be prescribed that can help with these side effects. Please notify your radiation therapist, clinic nurse or radiation oncologist if this is a concern.

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. Eat foods that are high in protein and try to avoid high fat foods during treatments. 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 course (e.g. crackers and toast), foods high in acidity (e.g. some juices, tomatoes and alcoholic beverages) and spicy foods.
- If you are having diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Imodium is the medication used for diarrhea and is available from your local pharmacist without a prescription.
- 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 that can help but will require a prescription. Be sure to talk with your health care team about any nausea you may be feeling.
- Drink 8-10 (237/8 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
- Use a gentle soap (e.g. Dove®)
- Use unscented lotions (e.g. Glaxal Base® or Lubriderm® lotion) on the area of treatment two to three times per day
- When bathing, use a clean wash cloth and do not scrub the treatment area, pat skin to dry using a soft towel
- Wear loose cotton clothing over the treatment area
- During treatment, protect the area from sun and wind. Do not expose the treatment area to sun during treatment and after treatment until reactions have subsided and then use a high factor sun block
- Do not scratch and avoid any friction in the affected area
- Avoid smoking – smoking interferes with healing and increases itching
- Avoid hot tubs, pools, saunas and tanning booths

**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.

- Dietician
- Patient Representative
- Patient and Family Support Services
- Guardian Angel Room
- Sexuality Counselor
- Spiritual Health Specialist
- Patient and Family Resource Centre
- Lennox Bell Lodge (for out of town patients) 204-787-4271
- A Port in the Storm (for out of town patients) 204-231-0720
- Volunteer Driver Program (for city residents) 1-800-263-6750

**Medical Contact Information:**

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

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