

What to Expect During Treatment: Radiation Therapy to the Bone

A course of radiation therapy is often a very effective way of treating cancer.

Sometimes, when cancer has spread to a bone, it causes pain. By treating the bone with radiation and killing the cancer cells there, the pain can often be reduced or eliminated.

Sometimes even when there is no pain, radiation therapy may be used to prevent fracture or collapse of the bone.

You may not notice relief while on treatment. It may take days or weeks to feel some relief.

What are the possible side effects of radiation therapy to the bone?

Common Side Effects

Side effects vary depending on what bone is being treated. Some of the most common side effects include fatigue and temporary skin irritation

Less Common Side Effects

Another side effect from radiation therapy to a bone may include flare of pain. This can occur in about a third (30%) of patients getting radiation therapy to the bone.

Flare of pain:

- Radiation Therapy to a bone can cause some inflammation or swelling in the area being treated. This can result in a worsening of the pain you have (called “flare of pain”) that may start a few hours or even a few days after your treatment.
- Flare of pain can last up to days or even a few weeks. If you do experience flare of pain, you will likely be advised to adjust your pain medication for a period of time. You may also be prescribed some new pain medication. Be sure to ask your Radiation Oncologist, Radiation Therapist or Nurse what you can do to cope with the temporary increase of pain.

Questions you may want to ask your Health Care Team

Will I have more pain in the area after my treatment?

Will I need to change my pain medication?

How soon will I feel relief from my symptoms?

Will I need to have more treatments in the future?

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

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It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.