

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.

If the cancer is pressing against the spinal cord or nerve root, symptoms like pain or trouble moving your arms or legs can occur. Treating the cancer in the spine with radiation therapy is often an effective way to treat these symptoms.

You may notice relief while on treatment, or it may take days or weeks to feel some relief.

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

Common Side Effects

The side effects vary from person to person. Common side effects may include fatigue, temporary skin irritation, and other side effects based on what part of your body is being treated. A member of your health care team can review these side effects with you.

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.

What is supportive care?

Cancer is a physical disease but it also can affect how you think and feel. Your emotional health and well-being are very important as you go through your treatments. It is normal for you and your family to have many feelings at this time.

You may feel anxious, frightened, worried, angry or depressed. There is support available in the cancer program. A number of health care professionals may be available for you and/or your family: they can include a social worker, nurse, therapist, spiritual care counselor, psychologist, and psychiatrist. They can help you cope with cancer and the emotions you are experiencing, as well as help with stress management, lifestyle changes, financial concerns or medication coverage.

At any time you can ask your Radiation Oncologist, Nurse or Radiation Therapist to refer you to this support team. You will then receive a call from a member of the team to set up a separate appointment.

There are also Support and Wellness Groups available where you can talk with or listen to others who have a similar experience, or learn more about cancer and how to live well with it. Information about these groups is available at the reception desk at your Cancer Centre or through the Canadian Cancer Society – Nova Scotia Branch.

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?

What are your questions? Please ask. We are here to help you.



Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Nova Scotia Health Authority

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.