

Three large, thick, teal-colored arcs of varying radii on the left side of the page, partially overlapping each other.

Stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) to the spine

A horizontal teal bar with a white border on the right side, containing the word 'Radiotherapy' in white text.

Radiotherapy

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Side effects during and after your treatment	2
Contact details.....	5



This information is for patients who are going to receive stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) to their spine.

SABR is an effective way of giving radiotherapy. SABR is given over fewer treatment sessions which increases the chances of controlling the tumour and reducing pain more effectively than standard radiotherapy for some suitable patients.

This leaflet will explain:

- General information about side effects of treatment
- Any side effects that may affect your lifestyle and ways in which you can reduce or even overcome them
- Who to contact when you need advice

You might find it helpful to read The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre booklet 'Radiotherapy,' which explains how radiotherapy works.

Side effects during and after your treatment

Likely

The following risks are likely if you have treatment to the bones of the spine:

1. Your skin may become slightly red, dry and itchy, similar to sunburn at the treatment site. If your skin becomes uncomfortable, ask the radiographers for advice.

You can help yourself by:

- Wearing loose fitting clothes made from natural fibres such as cotton, to allow the air to circulate around the treatment area.
 - Washing the area very gently in lukewarm water with a mild, unperfumed soap, e.g. baby soap, twice a day. A shower is ideal, patting the area dry with a soft towel. Do not rub.
 - Only applying creams recommended by your radiographer, doctor or nurse.
2. Tiredness (fatigue), it is quite common to feel more tired than usual for several weeks after your treatment has finished. It is important to rest when you feel the need to do so and ask your family and friends to help when they can. Gradually you will get back to normal activities.



3. If you are having your upper spine treated, you are likely to experience inflammation of the lining of the mouth and oesophagus (passageway from mouth to stomach), which can result in difficulty swallowing. If this happens, your treatment team will advise as necessary.
4. If you are having your lower spine treated you may experience some nausea (feeling sick) and /or diarrhoea (loose bowels). If this happens, your treatment team will advise regarding medication you can take to treat this.

Less likely and depends on the area being treated

1. Inflammation of the lungs due to radiation treatment, which can result in cough, phlegm (thick mucous), difficulty breathing and/or pneumonia.
2. Fracture or compression of the treated bones of the spine, which can result in pain and which may need non-surgical or surgical treatment.
3. Discomfort or anxiety due to 60-90 minutes lying in a specific position, for the planning session and 30 minutes for treatment; your doctor may give you medicine to decrease the discomfort and/or anxiety.

Rare but serious – also depends on the area being treated

1. Oesophageal fistula (abnormal opening in the passageway from mouth to stomach). If you have any discomfort in swallowing, please tell your treatment team.
2. Scarring of the small or large bowel, which can result in a blockage in the bowel that would require treatment. Please discuss any changes in bowel habits with your treatment team.
3. Temporary or permanent damage to the spinal cord, which can result in:
 - Skin sensations, such as burning, prickling, itching or tingling
 - Muscle weakness causing inability to walk (paralysis)
 - Decreased ability or loss of ability to move a body part or to hold urine or control a bowel movement

Your Clinical Oncologist will see you regularly when your treatment has finished. If you have any problems or questions please contact your GP, the radiographers on your treatment machine or consultant via their secretary.



Contact details

The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust

www.clatterbridgecc.nhs.uk telephone 0151 556 5000

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk telephone 0808 808 0000

Macmillan Cancer Information and Support at:

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral 0151 556 5570

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Aintree 0151 556 5959

Information & Support Radiographer

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre - Wirral 0151 556 5314

How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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