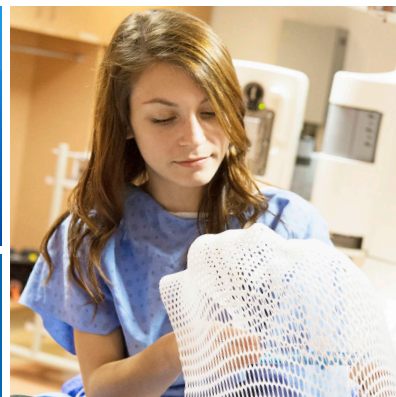


Treating a brain tumour with radiotherapy



Your doctor has proposed radiotherapy to treat a brain tumour. This fact sheet describes this treatment and the precautions to take so that everything goes as smoothly as possible.

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is a treatment that uses radiation, that is, high-energy X-rays. Its purpose is to destroy cancer cells in the diseased area and prevent them from multiplying and growing.

Radiation affects both cancer cells AND the normal cells in the body that it passes through on the way to the tumour. While most cancer cells are permanently destroyed, many normal cells repair themselves.

What is the purpose of the first visits?

Their purpose is to prepare you for treatment, and then to start it.

1st visit: making your mask and doing a planning scan (computer tomography)

Generally, a plastic mask is made to fit your face exactly to facilitate the treatments. The precise points where the radiation will be aimed are marked on the mask, so that you won't have any marks on your face. The mask-making process is painless, and the material used makes it comfortable and easy to use. While the mask is being made, you'll lie on your back with your neck supported by a head rest.

During this visit, the medical team will also examine the inside of your body using an imaging machine, the scanner. This procedure is called computerized tomography, or CT scan. The scan is used to map out very precisely the area of your body that will be treated and avoid affecting the parts that are not diseased. This is called the "treatment plan".



Sometimes a magnetic resonance (MRI) scan is also done to see the tumour more clearly.

Allow a half-day for this first visit.

2nd visit: verification and first treatment

First, technologists will describe the steps of the treatment. Don't hesitate to prepare your questions in advance and ask them.

This visit is, to a certain extent, a "practice" for a treatment session. After putting on your mask, you'll be placed in the very precise position that you'll maintain during all treatments. This is done with the help of various restraints. A trial run will then be done to make sure that the area to be treated matches what's in the treatment plan.

Then, if everything is in order, you'll receive your first treatment immediately.

What happens in the treatments?

During your sessions, you'll always be placed in the same position. The mask that covers your face will be attached to the treatment table to prevent your head from moving during the treatments.

At each session, the technologists make sure everything is working properly from a technical standpoint. After checking that you're in the right position, they leave the room. But an intercom and cameras keep you in touch with them. They can see and hear you, and you can talk to them.

After your treatment, a technologist will give you the date and time of your next appointment.



How long do the treatments take?

Each session takes about 20 minutes. You'll receive treatments for 3 to 6 weeks, every day, Monday through Friday. Treatment schedules may vary. If you have any constraints, please advise the technologist. You'll see your doctor regularly, who will make sure the treatments are going well.

Will I feel any pain?

During the treatments, you won't feel any contact or pain. However, you'll probably have some side effects during or after the treatments.

What inconveniences and side effects should I expect?

You'll have to travel every day for your treatments. Try to make arrangements to limit the disruption to your daily life.

The main possible side effects are:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Scalp redness and sensitivity
- Hair loss

Other effects may occur or increase in the days following the end of treatment.

They may be due to increased swelling (edema) around the treated tumour. You may be given medicine for this, or the dose of medicine you're already taking may be changed.

Side effects could be a worsening of symptoms you've already experienced or new ones (see the signs to watch for in the blue box on page 3).

Effects can also occur later on, sometimes 6 months after treatments. They may be due to the destruction or swelling of tissue around the treated tumour. The symptoms depend on the area of the brain that was treated.

How should I prepare **BEFORE** my treatments?

- Eat a healthy diet based on *Canada's Food Guide*.
- If you haven't already done so, stop smoking and drinking alcohol. Discuss this with your doctor.

How should I take care of myself **DURING** the treatments?

- > Take care of your skin.
 - Protect yourself from the sun.
 - Wash the areas treated by radiation with a mild, unscented, lanolin-free soap with a neutral pH. If necessary, ask your pharmacist for advice.
 - If needed, your doctor can prescribe a cream to use during the treatments. **Don't use any product on the treated skin without first talking with your doctor.**
 - Rinse your skin and pat it gently with a towel to dry it, without rubbing.
- > Try to maintain a steady weight.
- > Eat a healthy diet based on *Canada's Food Guide*.
- > Don't take any antioxidants or natural health products without first talking with your doctor.
- > Bring your current medication list and your pharmacy contact information to every medical appointment.
- > If you're fertile, use birth control for the duration of the treatments.

What to watch for

Contact your technologist quickly if you have:

- severe headaches
- nausea or vomiting
- numbness
- problems moving or walking
- weakness or dizziness

What precautions should I take **AFTER** the treatments?

Side effects may occur or increase in the 10 days following the end of the treatments. Here are some tips to help maintain your well-being.

- Apply the cream prescribed by your doctor or an unscented hydrating cream **until your skin returns to normal**. Continue protecting yourself from the sun.



- Fatigue will last for several weeks. Rest as needed, and resume your activities gradually.
- If you are fertile, use birth control for 6 months after the end of the treatments.
- If you haven't already done so, stop smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Keep eating a healthy diet based on *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Do moderate exercise. For example, walk 30 minutes a day, several times a week.
- Go to all your follow-up appointments, and talk with your doctor about any new or persistent symptoms. Don't hesitate to tell your doctor about your concerns.



Chemotherapy

It's likely that you'll also be receiving chemotherapy. The clinical staff will take this into account when scheduling your radiotherapy appointments. Remember to notify the technologists of any change (schedule or otherwise) to your chemotherapy treatments.

Can I cancel or postpone a treatment?

We strongly advise you not to miss a treatment session. If you have a serious constraint, you should call the technologists.

Who can I contact with questions during the treatment?

The technologists are your resource persons during the period when you're receiving radiotherapy treatments. Let them know if you have questions, concerns, or discomfort. If they can't answer you, they'll point you towards the right person.

After the treatments, your clinical care provider will be your resource person.

You'll be given their contact information at your first visit.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante



NOTEPAD



Questions



Resource people and contacts

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca

