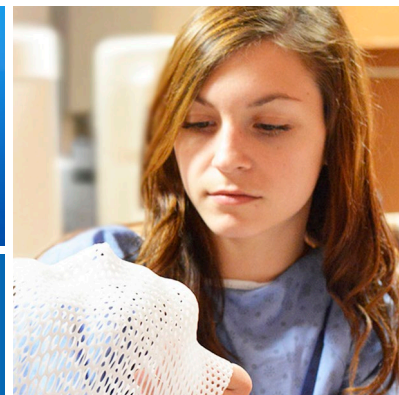


Treating a brain tumour with stereotactic radiotherapy



Your doctor has proposed stereotactic 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, or at least prevent them from multiplying and growing.

Radiation affects both cancer cells AND the normal cells in the body that it passes through. While cancer cells are often permanently destroyed, many normal cells repair themselves.

What is stereotactic radiotherapy?

In stereotactic radiotherapy, a large quantity of very small high-energy rays are aimed at the area to be treated, with great precision (down to the millimeter). In this way, a high-dose treatment can be completed in a few sessions.



What is the purpose of the first visit?

It has two purposes:

> Making your mask

This plastic mask has the exact shape of your face to facilitate the treatments. The precise points where the radiation will be aimed are marked on the mask. That way, you won't have any marks on your face.

Creating the mask is painless, and the material used makes it comfortable and easy to use. While it's being made, you'll lie on your back with your neck supported by a head rest. It's important that you're comfortable. If you're not, tell the care team.

> Taking images for planning

The medical team will examine the inside of your body using an imaging machine. This procedure is called computerized tomography, or CT scan. The scan is used to map out very precisely the area of your head 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 half a day for this first visit.

What happens in the treatments?

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

During your sessions, you'll always be placed in the same position. This is done using various restraints. 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.

They make sure that the area to be treated matches the treatment plan.

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

X-rays will be taken at the beginning and during the treatment to make adjustments if necessary.

After your treatment, a technologist will give you a date and time of your next appointment, if there is one.

You may be given medication, called steroids. This is to reduce any swelling that might happen in your head after the treatment.

How long do the treatments take?

Each session takes between 30 minutes and 2 hours. The number of sessions is decided by your doctor. If you want, you can bring your own music CD to distract you during the treatments. Over the course of your treatments, you'll see your doctor, who will check to make sure they 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 after the treatment(s).

What are the possible side effects?

Stereotactic radiotherapy to the brain is generally well tolerated. There is rarely any nausea or hair loss. But you may experience some fatigue. In some cases, there may be a small risk of a seizure in the first 48 hours.

Other side 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 the 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.

What precautions should I take AFTER the treatments?

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

- > **Important! It's recommended that you NOT drive** on treatment days and the following days. Your doctor will tell you when you can drive again.



- > Fatigue can last for several weeks. Rest as needed, and resume your activities gradually. If you live alone, ask someone close to you to check on you the day after your treatment.
- > If you're fertile, use birth control for 6 months after treatment ends. If you plan to have children, discuss it with your doctor.
- > Take care of your skin: protect it from the sun, and wash the areas treated by radiation with a mild, unscented, lanolin-free soap with a neutral pH. If necessary, ask your pharmacist for advice.
- > Eat a healthy diet based on *Canada's Food Guide*.
- > Go to all your follow-up appointments. Talk with your doctor about any new or persistent symptoms. Don't hesitate to tell your doctor about your concerns.
- > Bring your current medication list and your pharmacy contact information to every medical appointment.



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

What to watch for

Call the healthcare team quickly if you have:

- severe headaches
- nausea or vomiting
- swollen limbs
- difficulty speaking or moving
- weakness or dizziness

Can I cancel or postpone a treatment?

You're strongly advised not to miss a session. If you have a serious constraint, call the technologists.

Who can I contact with questions during the treatment?

Your resource persons are:

- The technologists, 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.
- Your clinical care provider, after the treatments.

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