



Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy (SBRT) to the Spine

SBRT is a type of high dose radiation used to treat small tumours. This handout offers information about this treatment and how you need to prepare for appointments.

After each radiation treatment, it is safe for you to be around other people (including children) and pets. You are not radioactive.

It is important you do not move during treatment. This allows treatment to be given correctly.

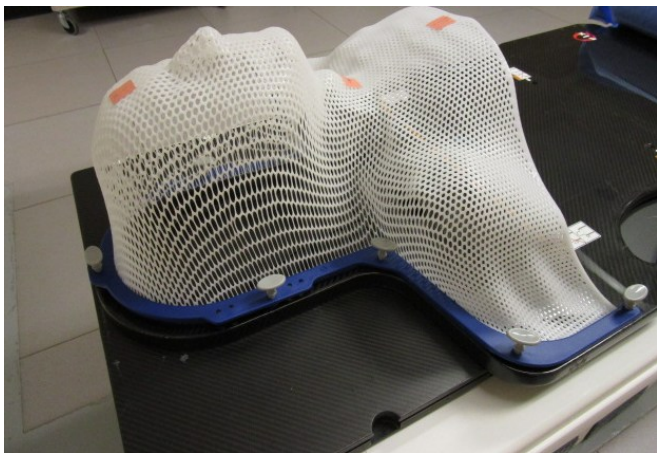
CT Simulation

CT simulation is the first step in preparing you for SBRT treatment. At this appointment you have a 'planning' CT scan. CT simulation allows your radiation oncologist to see your tumour(s) and decide the best way to treat it.

For CT simulation, you are positioned on your back using an immobilization device. This device helps you stay in the right position for your treatment. The type of device used depends on the part of your spine being treated. For treatment to your upper spine, a custom mask is made for you (see picture # 1 on page 2). A custom cushion made is made for you using the BodyFix system (see picture # 2 on page 2) for treatment to your middle to lower spine.

If you have your CT simulation using the BodyFix system:

- A cushion is placed under your body. A plastic sheet is loosely placed on top of your body. The cushion and plastic sheet will tighten to your body as a vacuum removes air from them. This will not hurt.
- **You need to wear the same close-toed shoes for your CT simulation and every treatment appointment.** Winter boots, flip-flops or sandals do not work well. If you wear any of these to your appointment, bring a pair of close-toed shoes with you.



Picture #1: This is a picture of a custom mask.



Picture #2: This is a picture of the BodyFix system.

The immobilization device made for you at this appointment is used for your radiation treatments. Your treatment appointments are much longer than your CT simulation appointment. Tell the radiation therapists if you are not comfortable at any time. We need to find a position comfortable for you.

You are given permanent tattoos (small markings) at this appointment. These tattoos are used to position you for your radiation treatments.

Treatment planning

The next step is treatment planning where your team finds the best way to direct the radiation to your tumour(s). You are not present for treatment planning.

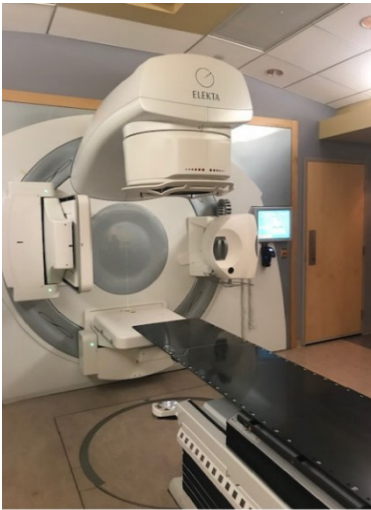
Radiation treatment

Each treatment is about 1 hour.

It may help to take pain medication (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) before your radiation treatment appointments if you normally have muscle or bone pain. This may help you be more comfortable during your treatments.

Radiation treatments do not hurt. It is important you do not move after you are in the right position on the treatment bed. This makes sure the treatment is given correctly. You can breathe normally.

X-ray images will be taken to confirm your position. Changes to your position are made if needed. To make these changes, the treatment bed you are lying on may move a little.



Picture #3. This is a picture of a radiation machine used to give SBRT treatment.

Preparing for your radiation treatments

- If the BodyFix system was used during your CT simulation, wear the same closed-toe shoes you wore for your CT simulation appointment to every treatment appointment.
- Take your regular medications (unless your radiation oncologist tells you not to).
- It is okay to eat a light meal and drink fluids before your treatment.

Side effects of your radiation treatments

You will receive the handout “Having Radiation Therapy to Manage Your Symptoms” at your CT Simulation appointment. This handout offers information on the possible side effects of radiation therapy. For more information on radiation treatment, see the Canadian Cancer Society’s booklet on Radiation Treatment: A Guide for People with Cancer. Go to the Canadian Cancer Society’s website at cancer.ca and search for the name of the booklet.

If you have a problem or concern about a symptom or side effect from your cancer treatment:

1. Call your primary nurse at the cancer centre from Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4 pm, (except on holidays). Use the phone number your primary nurse gave you.
2. Contact CareChart Digital Health from Monday to Friday, 4 pm to 8:30 am and anytime on weekends and holidays for symptom management support.

Talk to a nurse using one of these options:

- Call the after-hours telephone line at 1-877-681-3057.
- Request a video call by going to carechart.ca.
- Use the CareChart Digital Health App. This App is available to download for iOS or Android devices.

Call 911 or go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you for a medical emergency. Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any information in this handout.

Last reviewed: March 2025