Stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) to the lung

Information for patients
Weston Park Hospital
Introduction

Stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) uses high energy x-rays to kill cancer cells whilst causing as little damage as possible to normal cells. It is an effective way of delivering radiotherapy treatment to increase the chance of controlling the cancer.

SABR uses small beams to spare normal tissues from higher doses of radiation, minimising any side effects. It is given in 3-10 treatments, usually as an outpatient. The treatment is given on alternate working days, generally Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The alternative to SABR is standard radiotherapy which is usually given once a day, Monday to Friday, for 4 weeks or sometimes 3 times a day for 12 consecutive days.

General health care

You should eat and drink normally whilst having your treatment.

You may feel more tired than usual so it is important to get plenty of rest.

If you are taking prescription tablets or medicines, carry on unless advised to stop by one of our doctors. Always make sure you have an adequate supply of medication.

Smoking

We strongly advise you stop smoking completely. Smoking can make the radiotherapy reaction worse and prolong recovery time.

The NHS Stop Smoking Service can be contacted on 0800 612 0011 or 0330 660 1166.
Side effects

Side effects vary from person to person and not everyone will experience all of these effects. You should be able to continue your usual activities throughout the treatment.

Early side effects

Early side effects may occur during radiotherapy or up to 12 weeks after treatment has finished. These include:

Skin reaction
It is possible that skin in the area being treated may become slightly red and dry and occasionally itchy. The radiographers will give you advice about skin care. You may use a moisturiser if required. Avoid deodorant, perfumes and cosmetics in the treatment area. Gently wash the treatment area and pat dry with a soft towel. Do not expose the treatment area to direct sun during treatment and until the reaction has settled. Following radiotherapy, skin in the treated area will always be more sensitive to the sun and you should always use a high factor sunblock.

Tiredness
It is quite common to feel tired during radiotherapy and for several weeks after the completion of the treatment. This is usually a combination of the physical effects of the radiotherapy and attending for each session. If necessary, accept offers of help from family and friends. Drink plenty of fluids and rest when you feel the need to do so.

Coughing
This may seem worse during and after treatment. A mild linctus helps this to settle.

Chest pain
You may experience some chest pain after SABR treatment if the tumour is close to your chest wall. This can usually be relieved with some
mild pain relief such as paracetamol. Please speak to the radiotherapy team if your pain is more severe.

**Breathlessness and / or raised temperature**
Sometimes treatment can cause inflammation of the lungs. This may occur 6-12 weeks after treatment has finished. The signs of this can be breathlessness, a cough and flu-like symptoms. This should get better on its own within a few weeks. However, some patients may require a short course of oral steroid tablets. If the side effects continue, or if you have any concerns, please contact your clinical oncologist consultant or GP.

**Swallowing and eating**
Your swallowing may become more difficult, accompanied by having the feeling of a lump in your throat. We can prescribe lubricating medicines and pain relief to help with this, but you may also need to modify your diet to eat softer foods.

**Late side effects**
Late side effects may occur after 3 months or more following completion of treatment. These include:

**Lung scarring / collapse**
The radiotherapy will cause some scarring (fibrosis) and possibly some collapse of the lung tissue in the area the cancer was treated. This can cause breathlessness which in a very small number of cases may require oxygen therapy.

**Chest wall pain / rib fractures**
For tumours close to the ribs, there is a chance that the radiation dose may weaken the ribs, causing pain and possibly rib fractures. A small number of patients who have a rib fracture may need to take pain killers, possibly for a long period of time.
**Upper arm nerve damage**
For tumours close to the top of the lung, there is a small risk of permanent damage to the bundle of nerves going to the arm (brachial plexopathy). This would mean that there may be numbness or weakness in part of the arm. The chances of this are very small.

**Second cancer**
Very rarely radiation can cause a second tumour. However, the benefits of the treatment far outweigh any potential risk in the future.

**At the end of your treatment**
On the last day of treatment you will be given an appointment to see the doctor, either at Weston Park or your local hospital. The radiographer should offer you a post-treatment phone call which will provide advice and support until you see the doctor again, but please ring the department if you have any queries.

Radiotherapy reactions continue to build up for a week or two. They gradually settle down over a few weeks. You should carry on looking after yourself as you did during the treatment.

Many patients experience fatigue for some time after a course of radiotherapy: this is quite normal. Rest when you need to. Light exercise may also help. If you have any concerns, contact the radiotherapy department or your GP.

**Additional help and advice**
We can arrange contact with the following if needed:

- Dietitian
- District Nurse
- Macmillan Nurse
- Specialist Nurse Counsellor
- Social Worker / Benefits advice
More help and information

If you are worried about any aspect of the radiotherapy or its side effects, please speak to the radiographers on your treatment unit.

You can call the numbers below:

- Radiotherapy Department: **0114 226 5292**

- Out of hours emergencies (after 5.00pm and weekends): **0114 226 5000** and ask for duty sister

- Alternatively you can call your GP

The **Information and Support Team** offers information, advice and support for all patients, their family and friends.

- Telephone: **0114 226 5282**

- Email: **sht-tr.RTInfo@nhs.net**

Or call into the **Information and Support Office** which is in Radiotherapy reception on the lower ground floor. If staff are not available, leave a message and they will contact you at the earliest possible time.
Useful Contacts

Weston Park Cancer Information and Support Centre

- 0114 226 5666

Rotherham Macmillan Cancer Information and Support

- 01709 427 659

Chesterfield Nenna Kind Cancer Support Drop-in Centre

- 01246 555 514

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Information and Support Service, St Johns Information and Support Centre

- 01302 796 600

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation

- www.roycastle.org

Macmillan Cancer Support

- 0808 808 0000
  - www.macmillan.org.uk

Marie Curie Cancer Care

- www.mariecurie.org.uk