Standard-Dose Radiation Therapy Works Better Than High-Dose Radiation Therapy for Patients with Stage III Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer

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Patients with stage III non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) who participated in a recent study lived longer and had fewer side effects when they received the standard dose of radiation therapy and not the high-dose radiation therapy. Stage III NSCLC is usually difficult or impossible to remove with surgery. Radiation therapy is used to slow the growth and spread of the cancer to lengthen patients? lives. The standard dose for radiation therapy is 60 Gray (Gy), a measurement of how much radiation is absorbed by the body, although many doctors use higher doses in the hope of better controlling the cancer?s growth.

In this study, 464 patients received either standard-dose or high-dose radiation therapy combined with standard chemotherapy, the drugs paclitaxel (Taxol) and carboplatin (Paraplatin), plus the drug cetuximab (Erbitux) or no additional drugs.

Researchers found that the patients who received the standard radiation therapy dose lived nearly two and a half years compared with a little more than one and a half years for those who received high-dose radiation therapy. In addition, patients who received the standard dose of radiation therapy were less likely to have the cancer come back and less likely to die from problems related to the treatment than those who received high-dose radiation therapy.

What this means for patients

?We were surprised, though also pleased, to discover that less intense treatment led to better control of cancer progression and spread and even improved overall survival,? said lead author Jeffrey D. Bradley, MD, Professor of Radiation Oncology at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri. ?The reasons why high-dose radiation therapy did not improve survival and disease control are not yet clear.? If you have been diagnosed with lung cancer, be sure to talk with your doctor about the treatment options, including the goals of treatment, what to expect, and the possible side effects.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What type and stage of lung cancer do I have?
- What is my prognosis (chance of recovery)?
- What are my treatment options?
- Is radiation therapy recommended? If so, what type and dose?
- What are the side effects of each treatment option?

For More Information

Guide to Lung Cancer [1]

Understanding Radiation Therapy [2]

What to Know: ASCO?s Guideline on Adjuvant Treatment for Lung Cancer [3]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/node/19148
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24728
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/29846