

Preparing for RADIATION THERAPY

Essential steps to help you get ready for radiation therapy and understand what to expect.



01 AT YOUR APPOINTMENT

- If possible, ask a friend or family member to accompany you to the appointment for support as it is normal to feel nervous or scared and forget things during the appointment.
- Write your questions down ahead of time to be sure you get the answers you need.
- Bring a list of your medications and any symptoms you are experiencing.

WHAT IS RADIATION THERAPY?

Radiation therapy uses high-energy radiation (such as X-rays or proton beams) to **kill cancer cells or slow their growth**. Radiation damages the DNA of cancer cells, making it harder for them to grow and divide.

HOW IS IT GIVEN?

Radiation therapy can be delivered in **different ways** depending on the **type of cancer**. Your radiation oncologist will review which type is best for you.

- **External radiation:** This is the most common type used. Radiation is delivered from a machine outside the body and directed at the tumor(s).
- **Internal radiation or brachytherapy:** radiation is delivered by placing a source directly into and around the tumor in your body.
- **Proton Therapy** (in certain instances): Proton beams are used to reduce radiation exposure to nearby healthy tissue.



WHEN IS RADIATION THERAPY USED?

Radiation therapy may be used in the following ways:

- As the **main treatment** for cancer
- Before surgery to **shrink a tumor**
- After surgery to **reduce the risk** of cancer returning
- **Along with other treatments** such as chemotherapy or immunotherapy
- To **relieve symptoms** such as pain or bleeding (palliative treatment)

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

- **Radiation** is given as a series of treatments (or sessions), several times a week, typically over several weeks.
- Treatments usually last **only a few minutes**, but the appointment may take longer due to positioning and setup.
- Radiation treatments are **painless**.
- You will **lie still** on a treatment table while the machine delivers radiation.
- Radiation **does not make you radioactive**.
- Many people can **maintain** their regular **work schedules** and **daily activities** while undergoing radiation therapy.
- How you feel **depends on the area** being treated and the length of treatment.



02 BEFORE TREATMENT

WHAT CAN I EXPECT BEFORE MY TREATMENT?

- You may need a **physical exam** and **imaging** (typically a CT scan or MRI) before starting treatment.
- Getting set up for radiation involves **many steps** and can take a few days or weeks.
- You will have a **radiation planning appointment** called **simulation**, to customize your radiation treatment. This appointment typically lasts at least one hour. During this visit, your radiation dose and treatment plan will be determined.
 - You will be asked to lie on a simulator table which is a special CT scanner used to obtain images of the area to be treated. These images are used to create a “map” for your radiation treatment.
 - This CT scan is used only for the **planning process** and is not a replacement for other imaging scans you have had or may need.
 - It is important **to lie very still** on the simulator table. You will be placed in the same position during this visit as you will be during your actual radiation treatment sessions.
 - Depending on the area being treated, you may have **a mold or mask made** to help hold your body in position.
 - Temporary or permanent marks (or small tattoos) may be **placed on your body** to guide where the radiation will be delivered.



03 DURING TREATMENT

- The radiation machine is large and may move around you during treatment, but it **will not touch you**.
- The machine is designed to **direct and deliver a precise dose of radiation** to the tumor.
- As the machine shifts position, **radiation is delivered from different angles** to better target the cancer while protecting nearby healthy tissue.
- You will need to **lie still during treatment**, but you can breathe normally.
- A **radiation therapist or radiation technologist** operates the machine from a separate, nearby room to ensure safety.
- The healthcare team can **see and hear you** at all times and can stop the treatment if you need assistance.
- **Important: You will not feel the radiation while it is being delivered.**

WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING MY TREATMENT?

- Side effects are **usually limited** to the area being treated and may include:
 - **Fatigue**
 - **Skin redness, dryness, itching or peeling**
 - **Swelling or discomfort** in the treated area
 - **Hair loss** in the treated area
- Side effects usually **develop gradually** and may increase over time.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

- Keep the treated area **clean and dry**.
- **Do not apply** lotions, creams, deodorants, or powders to the treated area unless approved by your healthcare team.
- **Avoid** direct sunlight, heating pads, and ice packs on the treatment area.
- Wear **loose, soft clothing** over treated skin.

***TIP:** Always **check with your healthcare team** before using any skin products on the treated area.

HOW SHOULD I CARE FOR MY SKIN DURING RADIATION?

04 AFTER TREATMENT

HOW DO I CARE FOR MY SKIN AFTER TREATMENT?

- Side effects **may continue** for several weeks after treatment ends and usually improve over time.
- Continue skin care as instructed by your care team.
- Keep all follow-up appointments.
- Call your healthcare team if **side effects worsen** or if you have concerns.

WHEN SHOULD YOU CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM?

- Call your healthcare team if **side effects worsen** or if you have concerns, or if you experience:
 - Severe fatigue or weakness
 - Pain or skin changes that worsen
 - Fever or signs of infection
 - New or concerning symptoms

***Tip:** Be sure you have your **healthcare team's contact information** and know **who to call** during both business hours and after hours if concerns arise.

