

RADIATION THERAPY



In this section, you will learn about:

- How radiation therapy works
- What to expect from your CT planning appointment
- What to expect from your treatments
- Your radiation therapy schedule
- Commonly asked questions



My Radiation Treatment Overview

You will be receiving radiation treatment to your:
The type of cancer you have is a(n):
The radiation is usually given every day, Monday to Friday, for a total of _____ treatments. Your total number of treatments can change during the planning process. The number of treatments will be confirmed on your first day of treatment.
Your radiation oncologist (radiation doctor) is:
APPOINTMENT INFORMATION:
Radiation CT planning appointment: DATE:
Other appointments needed to plan your radiation treatment:
..... DATE:
..... DATE:
..... DATE:
Start of your radiation treatment:
<input type="checkbox"/> You will receive your start date at your planning appointment.
Medication to take during your radiation treatment:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Treating Cancer With Radiation Therapy

What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy is a type of cancer treatment that uses high-energy radiation to destroy cancer cells.

Almost half of cancer patients will get some type of radiation therapy. It may be used alone or together with surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, or other treatments.

How does radiation therapy work?

- Radiation is targeted at the cancer cells.
- Cells that are very active, such as cancer cells, are usually more sensitive to radiation.
- Normal cells in the treatment area may also receive some radiation. This is why you may have side effects.
- Normal cells are able to recover from the damage better than the cancer cells.

How is radiation given?

There are two different ways to deliver radiation:

1. External beam radiation therapy
2. Internal radiation therapy (brachytherapy) - radiation is placed inside your body or near the tumour.

This binder will focus on external beam radiation therapy. If you are receiving brachytherapy, you will be given more information by a member of your health care team.

External Beam Radiation Therapy

External beam radiation therapy is one way to deliver radiation from outside the body.

It is called a **local treatment** because the radiation is used for one specific part of the body. The radiation comes from a large machine called “Linac”.

Usually, patients get radiation once a day, five days a week, Monday through Friday. The number of treatments depend on your type of cancer, where it is in your body, your general health, and other factors.

What will I hear and feel?

- You will hear a buzzing sound when the machine is on.
- The machine moves around you but does not touch you.
- You will not feel anything, just like when you get an x-ray.
- Radiation treatments will not hurt you.



Side effects from radiation therapy

The side effects you have from radiation therapy depend on the type of radiation you have, how much radiation you get, where the radiation is targeted, and your overall health. Different people may have different side effects even if they are being treated in the same area.

Your health care provider will discuss what side effect you can expect.

When will the side effects from radiation therapy start?

Most side effects start gradually, usually toward the end of the second week of treatment. Side effects will continue throughout the rest of your treatment. They will slowly disappear about a month after your treatment is done.

What to expect at your CT planning appointment

Your first visit is called your **CT planning appointment** or **simulation**. During your **simulation**, your treatment is planned using a machine called a **CT scanner**. The CT scanner is used to outline the area for radiation treatment using x-rays. If you were given special instructions to follow before your CT planning appointment, please be sure to follow them.

On the day of your CT planning appointment:

- Check-in at the radiation reception desk, located on Level 1.
- A radiation therapist will take you to the CT scanner. You may be asked to change and take off any jewelry within the treatment area.
- You will be asked to lie on the simulator bed in the same position as you will be in for your treatment.
- To help you stay still and feel more comfortable during your treatments, the team may make you a special piece of equipment. This may be a **mask** or a **custom pillow** for your body depending on the area being treated.

Your CT planning appointment usually takes 1 hour.



Mask



Custom Pillow

- A radiation therapist will put some marks on your skin with a marking pen. Since these marks will wash off, permanent marks or “**tattoos**” need to be made.
- These tattoos are very small and are made using a small sterile needle. You will feel a slight pinch when your tattoo marks are made. These tattoos are used to help position you and will not come off when bathing or showering.



What happens after my CT Planning appointment?

Information from your CT planning appointment and your completed diagnostic tests will help your radiation oncologist decide exactly where the radiation will be given and how much radiation each area of your body will receive.

A team of radiation therapists and medical physicists work with the radiation oncologists to create your own individual treatment plan. This is a very complicated process and it can take many days to develop your plan. Many quality checks are done to make sure you receive the best possible treatment. This process usually takes about 2 weeks.

After your CT Planning appointment, you will be given a time for your first treatment or you will receive a phone call with the appointment date and time. You will get a phone call within 2 weeks of your planning appointment.

What to expect for your treatments

On the day of your first treatment, plan to be at the cancer centre for about 1 hour. After your first treatment, the radiation therapists can give you a better idea of how long your treatments will take.



- Check-in at the radiation reception desk, located on Level 1.
- You will be given a pager and asked to sit in the waiting room.



- When your pager goes off, a radiation therapist will be waiting at the reception desk to meet you.



- You may be asked to change into a gown or hospital pants just like you did at your radiation planning appointment.



- The radiation therapists will bring you into the treatment room and position you on the table.
- You will be asked to lie down in the same position as you were during simulation.
- Staff will help make you as comfortable as they can. Try to stay still and breathe normally.

- The therapists will leave the room and your treatment will start.
- The treatment usually takes 15-30 minutes. Most of the time is spent getting you into the correct position. The machine is usually on for less than 5 minutes.
- The therapists will be watching you the entire time through a video monitor.
- The therapists can stop the radiation at any time.



What will the rest of my treatment days be like?

Your treatment is the same every day. A team of radiation therapists will deliver your treatment.

Why do I have more than one treatment?

Radiation is similar to a drug prescription. This means that the dose of radiation may be spread over a number of days. The number of treatments is determined by the radiation oncologist. It depends on many factors such as your type of cancer, where in your body you are having treatment and the goal of the radiation treatment.

Patient Review Clinic



You will be seen by a nurse or radiation therapist in the **Patient Review Clinic** while on treatment. Your radiation oncologist will be at some of these visits. At these appointments, you will be able to talk about any concerns you have about your treatment or side effects.

Please write down any questions that you may have and bring them to your review appointment.

Some things you might want to talk about during your patient review appointments are:

- Questions about your treatment
- Side effects from radiation therapy
- Prescription renewal
- Coping with treatment
- Available support systems

Understanding your radiation therapy appointments



LRCP radiation hours:

Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

- Your appointment times **will not** be the same each day.
- You will get a schedule every week.
- The time of our schedule is your treatment time. Please be ready before your appointment begins.

Coming in every day for treatment is a big time commitment for you. The following questions and answers may help you learn more about how radiation therapy appointments are booked.



How are appointments booked?

Many factors affect the scheduling of appointment times. On the first day of treatment, the radiation therapist will confirm the number of treatments ordered and the scheduled end date. You will be asked to give a 4 hour time frame to help us schedule your appointments.

Call the radiation therapy reception desk if you need to change your appointment. Please give the booking clerks as much notice as possible.

Who do I call with concerns?

Regular business hours:

Call the radiation reception desk and they will direct your call to the right person on your health care team.

If it is after hours, a holiday, or on a weekend, call your family doctor or go to your nearest Emergency Department.



Commonly asked questions

Can you tell me if the treatments are working?

No, your radiation therapy team cannot tell you if treatments are working while you are on treatment. Radiation takes time to work. It keeps destroying cancer cells for up to two weeks after you have finished your treatment. You will see your radiation oncologist for a follow-up visit to talk about how well you responded to treatment.

Am I radioactive?

No, you are not radioactive or dangerous to family and friends.

Can I smoke?

It is recommended that you do not smoke. Radiation works best with more oxygen in your body and smoking lowers your oxygen levels. If you choose to smoke, you should not smoke at least two hours before and after your treatment.

Can I drink alcohol?

Alcohol may make your side effects worse, depending on your treatment area. Ask your radiation therapy team.



Recommended resources

Visit the Patient & Family Resource Centre to get free copies of the Canadian Cancer Society booklets:

- Complementary Therapies: A guide for people with cancer
- Radiation Therapy: A guide for people with cancer