

Radiation Therapy

Information Sheet



What is radiation therapy?

It is a type of cancer treatment that uses high energy rays to kill cancer cells.

About half of cancer patients receive some form of radiation therapy during their treatment.

How does radiation therapy work?

Cancer cells or tumors are targeted with high doses of radiation.

The radiation damages cancer cells and prevents them from growing.

Are there different types of radiation therapy?

Yes, there are two different types of radiation therapy.

- **External-beam radiation therapy** is when the radiation comes from a machine
- **Internal radiation therapy** is when radiation comes from an implant that is placed inside your body near or in the cancer.

Your doctor will determine which radiation therapy to use depending on your:

- Type of cancer
- Stage of cancer (how far the cancer has spread)
- General health
- Treatment goals

Is radiation therapy safe?

Radiation therapy has been used to safely treat patients for decades. Your radiation therapy will be carefully planned to focus on the cancer cells, while avoiding as many healthy cells as possible. Before you begin treatment, your radiation oncology team will develop a plan, just for you, to make sure you receive safe and accurate treatment.

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Does radiation therapy hurt?

The radiation itself does not hurt, but there may be unpleasant side effects to treatment.

What are the side effects I might have?

Each person responds differently to treatment. You may have few side effects or you may have many side effects.

Your side effects will depend on the part of your body being treated with radiation. Side effects may include:

- Skin changes such as dryness, itching, peeling, or blistering
- Fatigue or feeling tired
- Diarrhea
- Hair loss in area being treated
- Nausea and vomiting

Many of these side effects can be treated or prevented. Most side effects begin to decrease shortly after treatment. Talk to your doctor to learn which side effects you are more likely to have and how to manage them.

Where can I get more information?

The National Cancer Institute provides accurate and up-to-date information about radiation therapy, cancer types, prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and end of life care.

Phone: 1-800-4CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

Website: www.cancer.gov

The Rural Cancer Network (RCaN) offers other user-friendly, cancer educational handouts. For more information about questions to ask your doctor about radiation therapy, please see the “Radiation Therapy: Questions to Ask Your Doctor” handout.

Website: www.ruralcancernetwork.org



Carbone Cancer Center
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
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**Cancer Health
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For more local information, please contact:

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