

Radiation Therapy Team



Radiation therapy is a type of treatment for cancer. Radiation uses high-energy X-rays or particles to kill cancer cells. It's one of the most common cancer treatments. Your radiation therapy team includes specially trained medical experts who will work with you during treatment. The team will help you set goals. They'll make a treatment plan. Then they'll give you the treatment and support you through it. Ask questions when you don't understand what's happening. And let your team know how you're doing.

Treatment goals

The goals of radiation can include the following:

- Cure cancer
- Kill cancer cells that remain after surgery or chemotherapy
- Shrink a tumor so it can be taken out with surgery
- Control cancer for a period of time
- Reduce symptoms of cancer, such as pain or bleeding
- Treat cancer that has come back or recurs

Treatment plan

Your radiation therapy team will work with you to make a treatment plan. They will decide if external radiation therapy or internal radiation therapy called brachytherapy is the best to treat your cancer. They'll ask you about your health history. A physical exam and imaging scans will be done. Then the radiation therapy team will:

- Map out the position you'll be in for each treatment.
- Pick the exact place on your body where the radiation will be given.
- Decide the dose (amount) of radiation needed and the best way to give it.
- Plan the number of treatments needed.

Team members

Members of your radiation team include:

- **Radiation oncologist.** This is a doctor with special training in radiation therapy for cancer. They lead your treatment program. They may see you in follow-up appointments. This doctor works closely with your other providers to monitor the progress of the treatment. While you're getting treatment, changes can be made as needed. Another goal is to keep side effects under control. You will likely see this doctor at least once a week during treatment.
- **Advanced practice provider.** Nurse practitioners (NP) and physician assistants (PA) are advanced practice providers who may be part of your treatment team. They monitor your treatment along with the radiation oncologist. They may see you at follow-up appointments.
- **Radiation physicist and dosimetrist.** These providers help with the technical parts of your care. They calculate the exact dose of radiation you'll need. They also help decide the best shape and angles for the treatment beams. They work with the radiation oncologist to design the best treatment plan for you.

- **Radiation therapist.** This specialist operates the machines that give the treatments. They work under the direction of the radiation oncologist. Before every treatment, they put you into the right position. They may use immobilization devices to do this. Then they prepare the machine to make sure the beams are aimed at the right spot. Then they control the machine that sends the beams to the tumor. You can ask them any questions you might have. They'll be able to answer or refer you to the nurse or doctor to help answer your questions. You'll spend the most time with this therapist during your course of treatment.
- **Radiation oncology nurse.** This nurse assists the team in your care. They can give you information about your treatment and help you know what to expect. They also help you manage side effects. You may meet with the nurse at least once a week.

There may be other healthcare providers that are part of your team. These can include:

- Social worker
- Patient navigator
- Dietitian
- Dentist
- Physical therapist

If you have questions, talk with your team. Don't be afraid to ask any of the team members questions that may come up. They will answer them or direct you to another person on the team who will.

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