

At RadiantCare our goal is to assist our patients in every way that we can to make their treatment as stress free as possible. As one way to try and accomplish this goal, we have compiled

answers to our most frequently asked questions when patients are first beginning their radiation treatments with us.

What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy is one of the major treatment modalities for cancer. Over 60% of all people with cancer will be treated with radiation therapy sometime during the course of their disease.

Radiation therapy uses high-energy ionizing radiation to destroy cancer cells. The radiation causes the breakdown of important DNA molecules inside the cell, thereby preventing their ability to grow and divide.

Dividing cells (such as cancers) are more sensitive to radiation. Because of this, radiation usually has more effect on the cancerous tissues than the surrounding normal tissues. Radiation therapy is considered a **local therapy** because cancer cells are destroyed only in the anatomic area being treated.

If I'm going to have radiation treatments what happens next?

If radiation has been chosen as your desired course of treatment, you will be asked to read and sign an informed consent form.

Your next appointment

Before treatment can begin, you will need to complete a treatment planning session referred to as a simulation. The details of this are explained in the following section.

If you or your family is interested in touring our facility prior to your starting radiation treatment, please contact one of our nurses.

Simulation

What happens during the simulation?

At the simulation appointment we will be performing a treatment planning CT scan of the area to be treated, as well as the surrounding tissues. Depending on the specific site to be treated you may be asked to change into a gown. We will be positioning you on the x-ray table in the position in which you will be treated. We will make every attempt to make it as comfortable as possible for you.

How long is the simulation appointment?

The simulation usually takes between one to two hours. You are welcome to bring a music CD or an MP3 player if there is specific music you would like to listen to during the simulation.

Immobilization

It is very important to be as still as possible during simulation and the daily radiation treatments. During the simulation, special devices may be made to assist you in holding still.

Contrast Dye

Contrast dye may be administered orally or intravenously at the time of simulation to better visualize your anatomy. Please let your nurse know if you have had previous reactions to contrast. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire and sign a consent for contrast prior to the scan. On occasion we may ask that blood work be obtained prior to the administration of contrast material.

Localization marks on skin

To reproduce your position for your daily treatments, we may need to place a couple of permanent marks (tattoos the size of a freckle) on your skin.

Treatment Planning

Your personalized treatment plan

After your simulation our physicians, dosimetrists, and medical physicists will design a treatment plan specifically for you. We take special care to ensure that we design a plan that will deliver the prescribed dose to the tumor or target area while sparing as much of the surrounding normal tissues as possible.

How long does the treatment planning process take?

Depending on the complexity of your case, it may take several days to two weeks to complete the treatment planning and quality assurance process.

Quality Assurance

After your treatment plan is complete it is carefully reviewed by our team of medical physicists and approved by your radiation oncologist. Only the treatment plans that pass our rigorous quality assurance process will be approved for treatment.

Radiation Treatments

How many treatments will I have?

The number of treatments varies. Radiation therapy is usually given five days per week (Monday through Friday). Treatments generally last from two to eight weeks depending on the total dose prescribed.

How long does each treatment take?

Daily treatment appointments generally take between 15-20 minutes. However, your first treatment appointment may take as long as 45 minutes.

Will I be treated at the same time each day?

Your daily appointment time will be established at the time of your first treatment.

Unless there is a change in your schedule, this will be your treatment time for your entire course of treatment. If you need to change your appointment time for any reason, please let the radiation therapist know. We will do our best to accommodate your scheduling needs. If you are unable to make your scheduled appointment on time, please call us.

We expect to be able to complete your treatment at the scheduled time. However, on occasion we may experience a treatment delay. On very rare occasions, treatments may also need to be cancelled. In the event that your treatment will be delayed or cancelled, we will do our best to inform you ahead of time. Please make sure we have accurate phone numbers where you can be reached.

What happens during the treatment appointments?

On your first day of treatment you will be greeted by one of our patient care coordinators and escorted to our **patient-only** waiting area. Depending on the area treated you may be asked to change into a gown and/or scrub pants. Any jewelry that may be in the treatment area will also need to be removed daily for treatment.

From our patient waiting area you will be escorted by the radiation therapist to the treatment room. Everyday before treatment you will be asked to provide us with your full name and birth date. This procedure is one of many quality assurance checks that will be performed daily before you are treated. Once in the treatment room, you will be asked to lie down on the treatment couch. Any immobilization devices created during your simulation appointment will be used to assist you in holding still. Using lasers and any marks that you may have on your body, the radiation

therapists will carefully align you with the treatment machine. The radiation therapists will exit the room and, depending on your treatment plan, perform a number of imaging studies to ensure that you are positioned correctly. While the therapists are out of the room you will be under constant observation with the use of video cameras and an intercom system.

Once we have verified that you are positioned perfectly the radiation therapist will deliver your radiation treatment.

Will I feel anything during the treatments?

The treatment itself is painless and only lasts a few minutes. The machine will make a humming or buzzing noise while the treatment is being delivered.

How often will I see the doctor during my course of treatments?

You will see one of our radiation oncologists weekly during your course of treatments. We refer to this weekly visit as your “Check Day.” This is a good time to ask questions about your treatments and address any side effects you may be experiencing. If you have questions or concerns between your weekly checks please inform the radiation therapist and we will make sure your concerns are addressed in a timely manner.

What if I have questions and concerns while undergoing radiation treatments?

While undergoing treatment we encourage you to make our staff aware of any questions or issues you may have. Our clinic hours are Monday-Friday from 8:00am until 5:00pm. We also have a physician on call 24 hours per day, 7 days a week to address emergencies.

What happens when my course of treatment is complete?

On your last day you will meet with the nurse to discuss continued management of any side effects you may be experiencing and coordinate

follow-up appointments with RadiantCare and other providers as necessary. We will send a written summary of your treatment course to your referring providers. Please remember that we are available anytime by phone if you have any questions or concerns about your radiation treatments.