

Radiation Therapy

What is Radiation Therapy?

Radiation Therapy (also called radiotherapy) is a treatment that uses high doses of energy to kill tumor cells and stop them from dividing. **It is not a medicine.**

What does radiation therapy do to tumor cells?

Given in high doses, radiation kills or slows the growth of tumor cells. Radiation may also be used to treat symptoms caused by the tumor.

How long does radiation therapy take to work?

Radiation therapy does not kill the tumor cells right away. It takes days or weeks for the cells to die.

Does radiation therapy hurt?

No, it does not hurt while it is being given, however, there may be side effects. The most common side effect from radiation to the brain is fatigue, hair loss and skin changes to the radiation site. Sometimes, radiation can cause the brain to swell, resulting in neurological symptoms such as limb weakness or headaches. Please let us know if you need help managing these symptoms.

How is radiation therapy given to the brain?

Radiation therapy to the brain is called external beam therapy. During this process a machine outside your body aims the radiation at a specific part of your body. The total dose of radiation is typically spread out over several days (rather than given as a single treatment). This is called fractionation. Usually patients are treated on Monday through Friday with weekends and holidays off. The number of treatments and the dosage administered is dependent on the disease being treated.

First, you will have a 1-2hour consult with the radiation oncologist; a doctor who specializes in using radiation therapy to treat cancer. If you agree to have radiation you will be scheduled for a treatment planning session called a simulation. You will need a mask to help hold your head still on the table. The mask is made of moldable mesh material and will be made specifically for your face. The mask has air holes and holes can be cut for your eyes, nose and mouth. The mask attaches to the table where you lie to receive your treatments. This allows for the radiation to be delivered to the exact location every time.

What is Radiosurgery?

Radiosurgery is a specialized form of radiation that uses highly focused beams of radiation. Radiosurgery can only be used under certain circumstances and is not appropriate for every tumor.

What happens when I am done with radiation therapy?

Once you have finished radiation therapy you will need follow-up care that consists of check-ups with your doctor or nurse practitioner, and routine imaging.