

# Using Radiation as a Cancer Treatment

Radiation therapy uses high energy rays, such as X-rays, to destroy cancer cells and shrink tumors in different parts of the body.

It is used to treat many types of cancer.

Radiation therapy may be given before surgery to shrink a tumor.

Or it may be given during surgery or along with medicines such as chemotherapy.

Or it may be given after other treatment, such as after surgery.

Radiation therapy may be given when a person with cancer is not well enough for other treatment.

Radiation therapy is also used to treat symptoms caused by advanced cancer such as pain or trouble breathing or swallowing.

Radiation damages the genetic material of cancer cells, which stops their growth.

Radiation can be given in different ways depending on where your cancer is and the size of the tumor.

Two common kinds of radiation therapy are external-beam and internal.

During external-beam radiation therapy, a large machine aims high-energy rays at the part of your body with cancer.

Your care team may mark the areas where you're getting radiation with small spots like tattoos so they can find the exact place during each treatment.

For brachytherapy, also called internal radiation therapy, a high-energy implant is put inside your body near the cancer.

Another kind of radiation can be given by a pill or injection. This is called systemic radiation therapy.

How long and how often you get radiation depends on the type of radiation and the type of cancer.

Ask your doctor about your treatment schedule.

Radiation is one of the best ways doctors have to treat cancer.

Getting the radiation treatment doesn't hurt.

But it can affect healthy cells along with killing the cancer cells.

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So it's common to have side effects like mouth sores, hair loss, or feeling tired or having sore, red skin near the treatment area.

Side effects depend on the type of radiation you have, the part of your body that's being treated, and how long you get treated.

They aren't the same for everyone and they usually go away after you're done with treatments. Certain side effects may last longer. And some side effects may happen months or years after treatment ends.

Your medical team will help you manage side effects.

And there are things you can do at home too.

It will help to take extra good care of yourself by eating well and staying active.

You may need to limit how much you do depending on how you feel.

If it's possible, adjusting your schedule can help you rest when you need to and save your energy.

Ask your doctor about the side effects you should watch for and when you should call.

For example, call your doctor if you have a fever, if you're extremely tired and it isn't getting better between treatments.

Call if you have pain that doesn't go away, especially if it's in the same place. Or if you have a new lump, bump, or swelling. Call if you are unable to eat or drink.

And call 911 right away if you have Shortness of breath or trouble breathing.

You know yourself best, so call your care team if you have any questions.

Getting radiation can be stressful and it's a lot to deal with.

But knowing what to expect can help.