

Radiation Therapy - Frequently Asked Questions

Below is a list of questions and the answers that people commonly ask about their Radiation Therapy. We encourage patients and their families to ask as many questions as they need to get a good understanding of what to expect.

Some patients say it can be helpful to keep a diary, note book or document on your phone or tablet with questions you think of at home or when speaking to friends and family. We are happy to help work through these questions when you are next in the clinic.

How often do I need to come for treatment?

Most radiation therapy is given daily. Treatment is given Monday to Friday with a rest on Saturday and Sunday and public holidays. If your treatment is different to this a unique plan will be developed with you.

How long does treatment take?

The treatment itself is very quick, often taking under 30 minutes. It may take a little longer to set up for your first few treatments or in situations where you require pain relief or physical support for comfort during the treatment.

Does radiation therapy hurt?

No, the radiation therapy itself doesn't create a feeling, what is important is that you have the right supports and pain relief so that you are comfortable during your treatment. The machine will make a buzzing noise which can be unsettling, but it is just like having a normal x-ray.

Will the treatment make me sick?

Possible, some patients report tiredness and fatigue, however, radiation therapy treatment is localized and only affects the area that is being treated. For example, if the stomach is being treated it may cause some nausea or vomiting and if the rectum or bowel is being treated it could cause irregular bowel movements. We will arrange medication to manage these side-effects.

Will I lose my hair?

Hair loss will only occur if the scalp is being directly treated.

Will I be radioactive?

No. When the treatment machine is switched off, the radiation stops, inside and outside the body.

Can I hold children?

Yes, it is perfectly safe to be around and hold children, babies and pregnant women while you are having your course of radiation therapy treatment.

Can I still work?

Yes. The treatment may make you feel tired, but you are able to continue to work if you wish.

Can I drive?

The treatment may make you feel tired, but you are able to continue driving if you feel up to it unless your oncologist or any other doctor has instructed you not to.

Can I bath or shower?

Yes. Some ingredients in soaps and shampoos can react with the radiation treatment and cause your skin to become red and sore. We will let you know which soaps and shampoos are safe to use when you commence treatment. There may also be some dressings for treatment areas that are good to keep dry, which we will help you with.

Can I swim?

Yes, you can swim in fresh or salt water, but not in chlorinated pools. Before going swimming talk to your treating cancer nurse about what will work best for you.

Northern Cancer Service

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