

# What to Expect When Getting Radiation to Your Limbs

**For patients having radiation therapy at Princess Margaret  
Cancer Centre**

Read this pamphlet to know about:

- The main steps in planning radiation treatment
- How to manage common side effects
- What happens when you finish treatment
- Where to get more information

For more information on Radiation Therapy, please watch our patient education videos at [www.whattoexpectrt.theprincessmargaret.ca](http://www.whattoexpectrt.theprincessmargaret.ca). These videos offer a step-by-step guide to the radiation therapy treatment process. They explain how radiation works in the body. They also explain how your team works together to deliver the highest quality treatments.



Your radiation oncologist, nurse, radiation therapists and other health care professionals will provide you and your family with care, support and information throughout your treatment.

Please ask any questions you have when you come each day. Your radiation therapists can try to answer your questions or let you know which members of your health care team can help. You may also talk to your doctor or nurse at your weekly review appointment.



Interpretation is available if you speak very little or no English. Please let us know as soon as possible that you need help with interpretation.

## **Planning your radiation therapy**

Please check in at the reception desk on level 1B. We will take your photograph to help us identify you during your treatment.

You can expect to be here for about 1 hour for this appointment.

## **What to expect at your CT simulation appointment**

We will use a CT simulator with or without an MRI to decide on the area of treatment. A CT simulator is a CT scanner with special computer software that gives us the detailed x-ray images we need to prepare your treatment.

If you need an MRI as part of your simulation process, the scan does not involve x-rays and may improve visualization of the treatment area along with the CT scan.

If you will receive an MRI, you will need to be screened for any implanted objects, devices or metal in your body to make sure that it is safe to do imaging. Some examples could be:

- pacemaker, defibrillator, implanted medicine (port-a-cath), artificial joint, metal in your eye

**Please let your doctor and health care team know.**

To help to keep your limb still during each treatment, a device that moulds around your limb, foot or hand may be made. We do ask that you remove nail polish or any cosmetic nails for this procedure, since it may interfere with the mould making process. The radiation therapist will explain this and any other procedure to you at the appointment.

The radiation therapists may draw marks on your skin. These marks can wash off, so they will also give you a few small permanent tattoos using a fine needle. The radiation therapist will explain this procedure to you first. The doctors, physicists and therapists will use the information they gather to develop a plan that is right for you.

## **Your radiation therapy treatment**

### **When will I know about my first treatment appointment?**

You can expect a phone call at home a few days after your CT simulation appointment. We will give you the date and time of your first appointment. Your first appointment at the treatment unit may be a trial setup appointment.

### **Where do I go for my radiation treatment?**

Your radiation treatment will be at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. Check in at the reception desk on level 2B when you arrive. Level 2B is two levels below the main floor. The staff there will show you how to check in.

## **Can I choose when I have my radiation treatment appointments?**

A large number of patients are treated every day. Because of this, we may not be able to give you the times that you ask for. Your radiation therapists will try to help you if you have special reasons for needing an exact time.

## **What to expect at your radiation treatment appointment**

If you are scheduled for a trial setup, you will not have radiation treatment for that appointment. During the trial setup, the radiation therapists will check your treatment position and treatment measurements from the CT simulation scan. Cone Beam CT scan (sometimes called a “mini CT”) or x-ray images of the treatment area will also be taken.

For the radiation treatment appointments, the radiation therapists will check the measurements from your CT simulation scan. They will take a Cone Beam CT scan or x-ray images to check that you are in the same position every day. Once your position has been checked and any changes have been made, you will have your radiation treatment.

## **How long is the appointment?**

You should plan to be at the hospital for 30 to 60 minutes each day. In most cases your treatments will take about 15 to 25 minutes. Most of this time is used to make sure you are in the right position for treatment.

## **Will I see the oncologist (cancer doctor) during my radiation treatments?**

You will meet with your radiation oncologist and nurse once every week during your treatment. They will answer your questions or talk to you about any concerns that you may have. Tell them about any side effects you may be having.

# How to manage common side effects from radiation treatment

## **Skin changes**

You may have changes to your skin in the treatment area. This is a normal side effect and will get better.

Your skin may feel irritated after 1 to 2 weeks of treatment. Some areas may become dry and flaky in the next few weeks.

By the end of the treatment, you may have moist open areas. This is most likely to happen where two folds of skin rub together (such as the underarm or groin) or where a wound or surgical scar is in the treatment area.

To learn how to care for your skin please see the pamphlet "Taking care of your skin during radiation therapy."

The skin in the area being treated will begin to heal about 2 to 3 weeks after finishing your radiation treatments.

## **Will I get tired while on treatment?**

Fatigue (feeling very tired) can be a common side effect of radiation therapy although it may not happen to everyone. How much fatigue you feel varies with each person and depends on the area of the body that is getting treated. Sometimes it can begin early and may gradually increase during the treatment course. Usually it gets better over 1 to 2 months after the treatment is over. Continue doing your usual activities if you feel well enough to do so.

### **Do these things if you are feeling tired:**

- Pace yourself. Break jobs down into smaller parts.
- Ask for help with activities you do every day that make you tired or you find hard to do.
- Pick a relaxing activity (for example walking) or a hobby that you are able to do every day.
- Keep a regular sleep routine at night.
- Rest during the day as needed.
- Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- Have healthy, easy to prepare food on hand.
- Eat meals at regular times through the day and snacks if you need them.

### **What about hair loss?**

The hair that is within the treatment area may fall out. In most cases this hair will grow again, but in some cases the hair may stay thin or not grow again. Talk with your doctor if this is expected.

### **What happens when I finish treatment?**

Near the end of your treatment, we will give you a booklet titled “What to Do When Finishing Radiation Therapy.” At your final weekly review appointment you will be given a follow-up appointment to see the doctor a few weeks or months after your treatment is finished.

After treatment finishes, you may still have some side effects. These side effects will carry on and may get worse before they start to get better. This is normal. Continue to follow the instructions from your health care team until you feel better.

## Need more information?

For information about treatment and services at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, visit the **Patient & Family Library** on the main floor.

Phone: 416 946 4501 extension 5383

Email: [patienteducation@uhn.ca](mailto:patienteducation@uhn.ca)

Website: [www.uhn.ca/princessmargaret](http://www.uhn.ca/princessmargaret)

Visit [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca) for more health information.

Contact us to provide feedback or request this brochure in a different format, such as large print or electronic formats: [pfep@uhn.ca](mailto:pfep@uhn.ca)

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