

Radiation Therapy at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

For patients, families and caregivers

Read this pamphlet to find out more about:

Introduction.....	page 1
What is radiation therapy	page 1
Different types of radiation	page 3
Before, during and after radiation	page 6
Side effects	page 10
Seeing your doctor during treatment	page 10
Getting to appointments	page 13
After radiation treatment	page 14
More resources	page 18

This booklet may not answer all of your questions. Please talk with your health care team about any questions you may have.



Introduction

Having cancer and treatments can be stressful, both emotionally and physically. It is normal for you and your loved ones to feel anxious, depressed, afraid, frustrated or alone.

Your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist can help. Please talk openly with your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist if you have any questions or concerns.

Language



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

What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy (also called radiotherapy) is a type of cancer treatment that uses high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells.

Radiation therapy is used to:

- cure cancer
- stop the cancer from spreading and growing
- relieve painful symptoms

Radiation therapy may be used alone, or together with surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy or other treatments.

Usually you are given radiation therapy in small amounts over a few days or over several weeks. The type and amount of radiation treatment you receive depends on the type of cancer you have.

How does radiation work?

Radiation therapy works by using a machine to deliver high-energy x-rays in your cells within the treatment area.

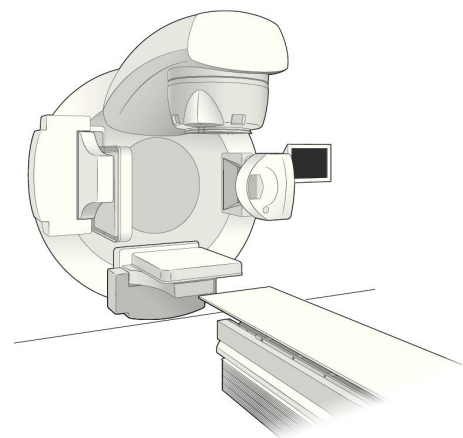
The energy from the x-rays damages the cancer cells. When this happens, the cancer cells cannot divide and grow easily. The cancer cells will begin to die and the body will naturally remove them.

Nearby healthy cells are also affected by the radiation, but they can recover better than the targeted cancer cells.

Different types of radiation therapy

There are 2 ways to deliver radiation therapy.

- **External beam radiation therapy** uses a machine called a linear accelerator. This machine aims radiation directly at the cancer.



The machine doesn't hurt as it moves around you without touching you. You won't feel anything as it sends radiation to your body from different directions. It does not make you become radioactive. You may hear small buzzing sounds when the machine is on.

This type of radiation is called a local treatment, meaning the radiation only affects the part of the body being treated.

Not all treatment schedules are the same. Your radiation oncologist will give you the schedule that is the best for you.

- **Internal radiation therapy (brachytherapy)** is a type of treatment where the source of radiation is placed either inside your body or close to your tumour. We will give you more information if you are having brachytherapy.



Who is my radiation therapy team?

Your team of health care experts work together to give you with the best possible care. The team will check on you during your treatment and help you to manage any side effects. Please ask any member of this team if you have questions or concerns.

Your team members and what they do:

Radiation Oncologists:

- ✓ Prescribe and develop your radiation treatment to make sure each treatment is safe and accurate.
- ✓ Meet with you every week to check your progress during and after your treatment.

Radiation Therapists:

- ✓ Work with radiation oncologists to help develop your treatment plan
- ✓ Carefully position you and deliver the radiation therapy each day
- ✓ Check your progress and help you manage any side effects

Specialized Oncology Nurses:

- ✓ Registered nurses (RNs) who work closely with your radiation oncologist
- ✓ Help explain the side effects of your radiation treatment and how to manage them

Clinical Students:

- ✓ All the students and trainees you meet will be working under the direct supervision of trained health care professionals

Clinical Physicists

- ✓ Make sure the equipment used for treatment is working safely and accurately

Other people who can support you:

- ✓ Registered Dietitians
- ✓ Social Workers
- ✓ Nurse Practitioners
- ✓ Spiritual Care

Please let your oncologist, nurse or radiation therapist know if you are interested in speaking with others who can support you.

What do I bring each day?

- Health card (OHIP). If you do not have an OHIP card, please bring another form of government photo ID (such as a driver's license, passport, or other provincial health card).
- Green Radiation Therapy Appointment card
- List of all of your medicines
- ANY** medicines that you may need to take while you are here, or in case you are delayed getting home

What happens before, during and after your radiation treatment?

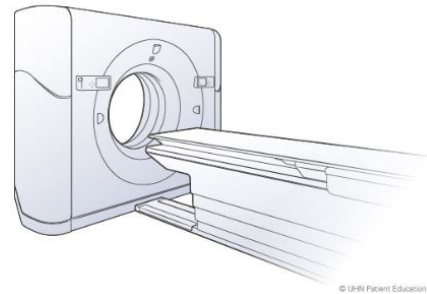
Before your radiation:

- Once you consent to have treatment, the first step in your radiation treatment plan is your CT simulation appointment.
- Depending on the area of your body to be treated, you may be need to prepare for this first appointment. If so, we will give you special instructions. **Please follow these instructions carefully.**
- When you arrive, check in with the Patient Flow Coordinator at the reception desk on **Level 1B** of Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

The Patient Flow Coordinator will:

- take your photo for your hospital chart to help us identify you at your treatment appointments
- ask you to fill out a form to let us know how you will be traveling to your treatment appointments
- ask you about any other medical appointments you have to help us schedule your treatment appointments

- Your radiation oncologist will decide if you will have a CT scan, an MRI scan, or both depending on the area of the body to be treated. The images taken from these scans will be used to plan your treatment.



- Sometimes during the scan, a positioning device or mould is made to help you stay still during your treatment. The radiation therapist doing the scan will give you more information.
- After the scan, the radiation therapist may need to make tiny, permanent tattoos (dots) on your skin. The tattoos are used to make sure you are in the right position for treatment every day.
- When possible, we will give you your first treatment appointment before you leave. If this is not possible, our booking staff will contact you with the date, time and location of your first appointment.

For more information on your CT simulation appointment, please see the CT Simulation link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQeUQ_eontk

During your radiation therapy treatment:

- When you arrive for treatment, please check in at a reception desk on **Level 2B** using your green appointment card and the bar code scanner.
- A radiation therapist will come to get you from the waiting area. Depending on the area of the body being treated, you may need to wear a hospital gown.
- Before the treatment starts, the radiation therapist will explain what to expect and answer any questions you have.
- The first appointment usually takes the longest because we will carefully check all the details of your treatment plan. **Please plan to be at your first appointment for 30 to 45 minutes.**
- Using your tattoos and/or positioning devices, your radiation therapist will put you the same position each day.
- Once you are in the right position, the radiation therapist will leave the treatment room to start the treatment. The radiation therapist can see and hear you at all times through a camera and intercom. If you are worried you can speak to the therapist and the machine can be stopped.
- We will take x-ray pictures every day before your treatment. We will compare the pictures with the images from your CT simulation appointment to make sure you are in exactly the right position.
- **It is important that you stay relaxed, breathe normally and remain very still.** If it helps you to stay relaxed, please ask the radiation therapist to speak to you over the intercom during your treatment. You may also bring in your own music on a CD to play during your treatment.

About my treatment appointments

- Treatment appointments last about 15 to 30 minutes.
- You will receive your updated schedule every Tuesday.
- Please tell your radiation therapist if you have any other medical appointments. We will do our best to coordinate them with your radiation therapy schedule.

For more information on your treatment appointments, please see the treatment appointment link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eH0MLes-Sd8>

Side effects of radiation therapy

You may have side effects from the radiation. This happens when the radiation destroys cancer cells and the nearby healthy cells.

Side effects are different for each person. Some people have many side effects while others may have few or none.

We will give you a pamphlet explaining the side effects that you can expect. Please talk to your radiation oncologist, radiation therapists or nurses about any changes you have. They will check on you throughout your treatment and tell you how to manage any side affects you may have.

Seeing your doctor during your radiation treatment

You will meet with your radiation oncologist once a week for a check up. Your oncologist will check your progress, talk to you about side effects and concerns you may have.

You don't need to schedule these appointments. They are already scheduled for you close to your treatment time.

Tip: Write down your questions and bring them with you to the appointment. You can also bring a friend or family member with you to these appointments.



Some things you might want to talk about during your appointment:

- Questions about your treatment
- Are you having any symptoms or side effects of treatment?
- Do you need a prescription renewed?
- Do you have enough medicine until your next visit with the doctor?
- How are you coping with treatment?
- What may be causing difficulty for you?
- Are you getting enough support from friends and family?
- Do you have any financial problems or difficulty paying for medicines or supplies needed for your care?

Radiation Nursing Clinic (RNC) – Level 2B Reception Desk

(Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:00 am - 6:00 pm)

RNC is a walk-in clinic for all radiation therapy patients to help manage side effects from your treatment.

- You can be seen at the clinic anytime during working hours.
- No appointment or referral from your health care team is needed.

Why would I visit RNC?

- New, changing or worrisome symptoms or side effects from your radiation treatment
- Skin care (such as saline soaks, dressing changes)
- Solving problems and getting support with new skills (such as feeding tubes, medications)
- To give yourself a feeding through your g-tube.
Important: please bring your own feeding supplies.

If you have radiation therapy issues more than 2 weeks after your radiation treatment is done:

- Call your radiation oncologist or specialized oncology nurse)
- Call the Triage Line number _____

Getting to my appointments

Most patients travel every day from home for their treatments. Some people take public transportation to avoid the cost of parking.

Depending on how you feel, you can come by yourself or be driven to the hospital by a relative or friend.

If you think you may need help getting to your appointment, please ask us about our pamphlets "[How to Register for Wheel-Trans](#)" and "[Using Wheel-Trans](#)". Or visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

The Canadian Cancer Society also offers volunteer drivers. You can call the Canadian Cancer Society to see if you are eligible for transportation services.

About parking:

If you plan to drive to the hospital or need directions to Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, please see Parking@UHN on www.uhn.ca or visit any of our Patient & Family Libraries for more information.

If you need a place to stay:

The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Lodge offers short-term stay for some patients living outside the Greater Toronto Area.

The Lodge is a self-care facility for people who can manage their own personal care and medications. It has an on-site cafeteria and family members can stay at the Lodge with you if there is space. (There is a fee for family members.)

Shuttle buses to and from the Lodge and Princess Margaret Cancer Centre are available for free.

For more information and weekly rates please call **416 413 7402**.

After you finish radiation

After you finish your radiation treatment, your radiation oncologist or referring doctor may want to schedule regular visits with you. This is called a follow-up appointment.

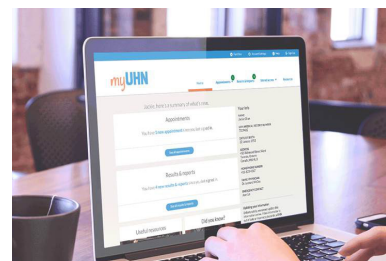
Follow-up appointments are important so that your doctor can check on you and the results of the treatment. See your family doctor for any ongoing medical care.

For more information ask about the pamphlet “Questions to Ask Before You Finish Radiation Treatment” or visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca.

myUHN Patient Portal

myUHN is a secure website that you can use to see your personal health information. From your computer, smartphone or tablet you can:

- ✓ Safely track your appointments
- ✓ Review test results
- ✓ Read clinical notes by members of your radiation treatment team
- ✓ Find links to trusted health information and websites



If you are interested in this service, you will need to register. You may do this in person at the time of your first appointment or online.

For more information on how to register or use myUHN Patient Portal:

- Website: www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/myUHN
- Phone: 416 340 3777
(Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm)
- Email: myUHN@uhn.ca

Your safety

Your safety is important to us. Let us know if there are any changes in your health, such as diarrhea, vomiting, a new cough, fever or chills.

While in the hospital, remember to wash your hands or use hand gel often.

Visit any of our Patient and Family Libraries for more information about how UHN keeps you safe. In-person: Princess Margaret Patient & Family Library – Main Floor

Website: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca



UHN patient classes and events

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and UHN offer many programs and services to help you and your family before, during and after cancer treatment.

Programs and services offer help with physical and emotional side effects of treatment, as well resources in the community.

Please ask your health care team about support groups, online chat rooms, nutrition and cooking workshops, relaxation classes (art, music) and much more.

For a full list of services, please speak with your radiation oncologist, radiation therapist or nurse or visit:

http://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/PatientsFamilies/Specialized_Program_Services

The Princess Margaret Cancer Journey App



This app is a complete guide to information and services that may help you during your cancer treatment. Use your smartphone to instantly:

- ✓ Find articles about what to expect at each phase of your cancer journey
- ✓ Ask questions of your health care team
- ✓ Find hospital and community resources
- ✓ See links to trusted health information

Download the app from home by searching for “Princess Margaret Cancer Journey” or go to the Apple App or Google Play Store.



Quit smoking

Quitting smoking is important during cancer treatment. It will help your body respond better to treatment and help you heal faster.

Please pick up the pamphlet entitled “Quit smoking to get the best from your cancer treatment”.

Need more information about how to quit?

- Website: www.smokershelpline.ca
- Phone toll-free: 1 877 513 5333
- Visit the Princess Margaret or UHN Pharmacies
- Nicotine Dependence Clinic – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

More resources for you

Princess Margaret Patient & Family Library

Located on the Main floor of Princess Margaret

Website: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca and click “More information about Libraries”

Phone: 416 946 4501 ext. 5383

Email: patienteducationpmh@uhn.ca

Canadian Cancer Society

Phone (toll-free): 1 888 939 3333

Website: www.cancer.ca

Useful phone numbers

- Princess Margaret main hospital switchboard 416 946 2000
- Radiation Therapy Reception Desk 416 946 2172 or 416 946 2187
- Psychosocial Oncology department 416 946 4525

We hope this booklet has helped you understand more about radiation therapy. If you have questions about your diagnosis, treatment or side effects, please ask a member of your radiation treatment team. For more information, please visit www.uhn.ca

Visit 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

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