

Radiation therapy

It's important to go to all of your radiation therapy sessions. If you need help getting to appointments, tell your doctor, Aboriginal Health Service or Worker or call Cancer Council on 13 11 20.

What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy is a common way to treat cancer. It's also called radiotherapy. This treatment uses a controlled dose of radiation to destroy cancer cells. It only works in the specific part of your body where the cancer is.

Why do I need radiation therapy?

Doctors use radiation therapy to target and try to destroy cancer because your body cannot "fix" cancer by itself. Radiation therapy may help to:

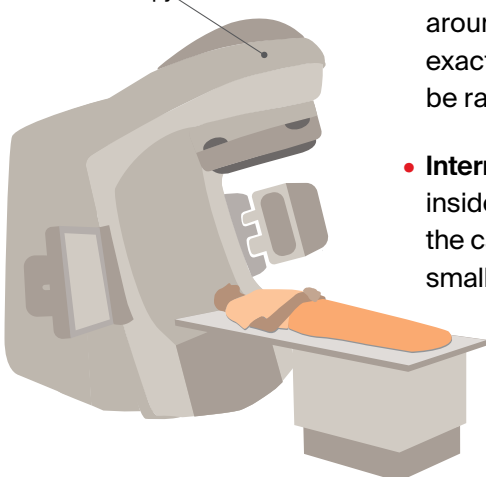
- cure the cancer
- shrink or stop the cancer from getting bigger
- control the spread of the cancer
- stop pain and other problems caused by the cancer.

How do I have radiation therapy?

There are 2 types of radiation therapy that may be used, depending on the type of cancer you have. These are:

- **External beam radiation** – Doctors use a machine to target the cancer from outside the body (see picture). You lie still on a table. The machine will move around your body and stop at different times to send strong x-rays into the exact spot where the cancer is. You can't see or feel the rays and you will not be radioactive afterwards.
- **Internal radiation** – Doctors put small radioactive implants (like seeds or wires) inside the body, close to the cancer. This means the radiation tries to destroy the cancer but doesn't harm healthy parts of the body. You might need to have a small operation for this.

A special machine called a linear accelerator (LINAC) is usually used to give external beam radiation therapy



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A radiation therapy session usually takes about 30 minutes. You don't have to stay in hospital overnight but you may have to come back every day until your treatment is finished.

Where will I have radiation therapy?

You will have radiation therapy at a treatment centre or a hospital. You will see a radiation doctor (called a radiation oncologist) and a radiation therapist (the health professional who operates the machine). They will work together to give you the radiation therapy in a safe way and reduce side effects. External beam radiation therapy is usually given Monday to Friday for a certain time. Your treatment team will talk to you about how many sessions you need.

How will radiation therapy affect my body?

Radiation therapy needs to be strong to destroy the cancer. Sometimes it affects how you look and feel during the treatment. Your doctor will tell you what side effects you may have. Most side effects get better in 4 to 6 weeks.

What you might feel after radiation therapy

You may feel very tired (fatigue), have dry, red or itchy skin and/or lose hair on the part of the body where radiation is given. Other side effects will depend on where the radiation is given. If you are having radiation in the:

- chest – you may have a cough
- head or neck – you may get a dry mouth and thick or sticky saliva
- top part of your belly – you may have an upset stomach
- lower part of your belly – you may get bowel or bladder issues; women may have women's issues.

More information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au
- Visit menzies.edu.au/cancer
- Your local Aboriginal Health Service

This information was adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a clinical advisory group and an Indigenous consultation group. Cancer Council NSW has updated this fact sheet in consultation with cancer experts and Aboriginal people with an experience of cancer.

This fact sheet features design elements from Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol, which was designed by Marcus Lee. Marcus was born and raised in Darwin, Northern Territory, and is a descendant of the Karajarri people. The Cancer Council Australia respect symbol (below) was designed by Riki Salam as part of his *Journey of Hope* artwork. Riki was born and raised in Cairns, Queensland, on Yidindji land, and has connections to Muralag, Kala Lagaw Ya, Meriam Mer and Kuku Yalanji peoples on his father's side and the Ngai Tahu people of New Zealand on his mother's side.



Cancer Council acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.