

The Comprehensive Cancer Center's Radiation Oncology Services at Rhode Island Hospital includes pioneering physicians, unique and sophisticated technology, and experienced staff. Ours is the only hospital-based radiation oncology program in the state.

Using an array of advanced technologies, the department of radiation oncology has a proven record of superior outcomes for patients who have been diagnosed with common and uncommon cancers of every anatomical site.

Our multidisciplinary team works together to provide integrated, streamlined care for every patient.

Team members include:

- Physicians
- Medical physicists
- Dosimetrists
- Radiation therapists
- Nurses
- Nutritionists
- Social workers

Our program works within the Comprehensive Cancer Center's multidisciplinary services to meet all of our patients' needs. We encourage patients to use free services such as patient navigation, clinical social work and complementary therapies.

As a critical member of your treatment team, it is important that you are informed and feel comfortable with your care plan. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. You can reach us at 401-444-8311.

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## Comprehensive Cancer Center

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# Radiation Therapy for Breast Cancer



## Comprehensive Cancer Center

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## What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy treats breast cancer by using high-energy x-rays to destroy rapidly dividing cancer cells. There are two types of radiation therapy: external and internal. Patients can benefit from one or both methods.

External radiation therapy involves using a machine outside the body that sends radiation to the cancer. Energy beams are aimed directly at the tumor site to kill cancer cells, while preserving healthy tissue.

Internal radiation therapy, also known as brachytherapy, delivers radioactive material into or near the cancer site via needle or balloon catheters placed in the breast. Similar treatments may be given with a mammogram-like machine called AccuBoost.

## When is radiation therapy used for breast cancer?

Radiation therapy is used after a lumpectomy or mastectomy to reduce the risk of cancer recurring in the breast, chest wall or lymph nodes. It may be used alone or in combination with chemotherapy and/or hormone therapy.

Radiation therapy is also an option when treating breast cancer that has metastasized.

## How is external radiation therapy performed?

Before starting treatment, you will be scheduled for a planning session. During this session, the best position for treatment for your specific situation will be established, which is often on

your back. A CT scan will be performed so that radiation planning can be tailored to the tumor and your anatomy. Your skin will be marked with permanent, freckle-like markers. Over the next several days, a treatment plan will be developed.

Once treatment begins, each day you will be escorted into the treatment room and positioned on a table under the radiation machine. Your radiation therapist will then leave the room and start treatment; however, you will be under observation and can communicate with your therapist via intercom. Align RT, a new form of image-guided radiation therapy, is used to ensure that you are in the optimal position for treatment during each visit.

Radiation therapy is painless; the treatment machine doesn't touch you, and it lasts only a few minutes.

## How long is a course of treatment?

A typical course of external radiation therapy consists of five treatment sessions a week, over four to seven weeks. Your doctor will tailor your treatment according to the size and location of your cancer, its type, your general health and other treatments you are receiving. If your doctor feels that a type of radiation called accelerated partial breast irradiation is appropriate, brachytherapy treatments with the AccuBoost system are given daily or twice daily for one to two weeks.

## How do I know if the treatment is working?

Because of the nature of cancer and radiation therapy, it is difficult to assess the effects of treatment immediately. However, after your sessions are complete, you will have follow-up exams and diagnostic tests, as needed, to evaluate your progress.

## What are the side effects of radiation therapy?

Short-term side effects of radiation therapy include swelling and heaviness in the breast. Your skin might feel rough, be swollen and reddish (like a sunburn) around the treated area. Most skin changes will improve within a few days to weeks following treatment. You might also experience fatigue.

## What should I do to take care of myself during treatment?

It's important to take good care of yourself for the duration of treatment, so make sure to get enough rest, eat healthy, protect the skin of the treated area and go for regular blood work as prescribed by your doctor. The Comprehensive Cancer Center's complementary therapy program offers a variety of services during treatment, including Reiki, hypnosis, massage and acupuncture.