

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

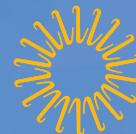
Our program works within the Comprehensive Cancer Center's multidisciplinary services to meet all of our patients' needs. We encourage patients to use free services such as patient navigation, clinical social work and complementary therapies.

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 Skin Cancer



## Comprehensive Cancer Center

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## How is radiation therapy used?

The goal of radiation is to kill cancer cells by directing strong X-rays or other radiation at the site of the tumor. The radiation damages the cancer cells and stops them from growing and dividing. Radiation therapy is a local therapy, meaning that it affects the cancer cells only in the treated area.

## When is radiation therapy used for skin cancer?

Radiation therapy may be used alone or in combination with other treatments. It is used most often if you are unable to have another treatment because of another medical condition, such as bleeding problems. It may also be used if the cancer is in an area that would be hard to remove with surgery, such as your eyelid, nose or ear.

Radiation can be used following other treatment to kill any remaining melanoma or nonmelanoma skin cancer cells. It may also be used to ease pressure or pain caused by advanced skin cancer.

## How will my therapy be determined?

You will meet with a radiation oncologist. This doctor will estimate the size of your cancer. For example, the radiation oncologist may find that a growth such as a basal cell tumor may be larger under the surface of the skin than it appears to be on the surface. The radiation oncologist will then create a plan that details what kind of radiation therapy you will have and how long the therapy will last.

Once your radiation oncologist has mapped out your treatment plan, a radiation therapist gives you the radiation. You may have this treatment either as an outpatient or as an inpatient. This depends on your cancer. If you're having treatment directed at just a small part of your body, it will most likely be done on an outpatient basis, meaning you will not have to stay at the hospital overnight.

## How long is a course of treatment?

External radiation for melanoma comes from a machine outside your body that directs strong X-rays at the tumor. You usually get these treatments once a day for five days in a row. You'll do this for several weeks. Each session only takes a few minutes.

## What are the side effects of radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy affects normal cells as well as cancer cells. Side effects of radiation depend on what part of the body is treated and the type and amount of radiation therapy.

Side effects that you may have after radiation therapy include:

- Red, dry, burning or irritated skin
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Appetite loss
- Nausea
- Diarrhea, if your abdomen is being treated
- Hair loss, if your head is being treated
- Mouth and throat sores, if that area is being treated
- Infection risk

Most of these side effects will get better or go away over time after you finish treatment. Ask your doctor which symptoms, if any, require that you call right away. For instance, you should call your doctor if there are signs of an infection, such as fever or pain.

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

Your physician will make recommendations for keeping your skin clean and moisturized, as well as advice on how to avoid irritating the treated area. The Comprehensive Cancer Center's complementary therapy program also offers a variety of services during treatment, including Reiki, massage and acupuncture.