

Radiation: Step by Step

Radiation therapy is a cancer treatment that uses high doses of radiation to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. It may be used to cure cancer, prevent it from coming back, or stop or slow its growth. It is also used as a palliative measure, to lessen symptoms such as pain or pressure.

Step 1: CT Simulation – also called CT Sim

CT simulation is the planning phase of radiation. You **do not** receive radiation on this day.

During this 1 to 2 hour visit, you lay in a CT scan machine in the position you will be in for your radiation treatment. Pictures of your treatment area are taken and used for planning radiation. You will get markings or tattoos that helps with positioning on the treatment table.

Plan to receive a reminder call before your CT sim visit.

An IV line and contrast for the CT scan may be needed. If so, you may need a lab draw that morning before your visit.

Step 2: Planning and waiting

Your radiation doctor, physicists and dosimetrists use the CT sim pictures to plan your radiation. The plan is sent to your insurance for approval. The whole process takes about 2 weeks.

Step 3: Radiation treatments

The therapists use your markings or tattoos to help you lay in the same position as your CT sim. They may use pillows, cushions or other devices to help you stay in the right position.

Each treatment visit takes about 15 to 45 minutes, but the radiation beam is only on for a few minutes. The machine may buzz or click during treatment. Your treatment does not make you radioactive or harmful to others. Once a week you have an on treatment visit (OTV) with your nurse and doctor. They ask how you are doing and can help you manage any side effects.

Step 4: Ringing the bell

You can celebrate your last radiation treatment by ringing a bell in our department.

Step 5: Follow-up visits

Follow-up visits may include seeing your doctor or a nurse practitioner or imaging tests like a CT scan. Your doctor talks about your follow-up plan before your treatment is finished.