



Radiotherapy, also called radio or radiation therapy, uses high energy rays to treat cancer.

What is radiotherapy?

- It is a course of high energy rays. They are like rays of light. You cannot feel them. They are painless.
- It is a common way to treat cancer.
- It works in the area of your body where the cancer is.

Why do I need it?

Because your body cannot fix cancer by itself, doctors use radiotherapy to target and kill cancer.

This treatment may help to:

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

How do I get radio?

There are two type of radiation therapy that your doctor may recommend, depending on your cancer

Internal radiation: Doctors put small x-ray seeds inside the body, directly on the cancer, to treat the cancer. This may require minor surgery.

External beam radiation: Doctors use a machine to target the cancer from outside the body. You lie still on a table. The machine will move around you and stop at different times to put high energy rays into the cancer.

Where do I go to get radio?

You will have radiotherapy at a cancer centre in a hospital. A radiation oncologist (radiation doctor) and a radiation therapist (delivers the treatment) will work together to give you the radiotherapy safely and reduce side effects.

How long will I have radio?

It is usually given once a day for several weeks.

How will the radio affect my body?

Radiotherapy needs to be strong to kill the cancer in your body and sometimes it can affect how you look and feel during the treatment.

What you feel depends on where the radiation is going in the body. Your doctor will tell you what side effects you may have. Most go away in 4–6 weeks. Some people:

- feel tired
- have itchy skin on the body part receiving the radiation
- lose body hair.

If you are having radiation in the:

- chest – you may have a cough
- head or neck – you may get a dry mouth and thickened saliva
- upper tummy – your stomach may become upset
- a little lower - your bowel or bladder may be affected.

This information has been 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. Production by Cancer Council.