

Linear Accelerators in Radiation Oncology

You may have a lot of questions about radiation therapy. This handout has a list of questions that many patients have asked. We hope this will help you understand what will happen during your treatments.

When will I get the results of my CT scan?

Your CT scan is only for planning treatments. Doctors or therapists will use this scan to see changes in your tumor.

When will my first radiation therapy treatment be?

After your CT scan, your treatment plan will be made. You do not have to be there for this part. The radiation therapist from your treatment machine will call you in a week or two to set up your first treatment. The therapists will try their best to work with your schedule.

Where will my treatment be?

The therapist will call you and tell you which machine you will use for your treatment. They will give you directions to that machine.

Where do I check-in?

When you come in for treatments, you will not need to check-in at the main registration desk. You may come straight down to radiation oncology and check-in at the radiation therapy reception desk. If no one is at the desk, you can have a seat in the waiting room by your treatment machine.

When will I see my doctor or nurse?

During treatment, your doctor and nurse will see you on a regular basis. They will follow your progress, assess any side effects, and address any concerns you may have.

If concerns come up on days that you will not see your doctor, let your therapists know. They can answer your questions or refer you to someone else who may help.

Can I feel the radiation?

You will not feel the radiation. You can hear the machine turn on and make a buzzing sound.

Who is on my treatment team?

- **Radiation therapists** work with doctors to give the daily treatment. They are under the doctor's guidance. They maintain daily records. They often check the treatment machines to make sure they are working well.
- **Dosimetrists** carefully calculate the dose of radiation to make sure the tumor gets enough. Using computers, they work with the doctor and the medical physicist to create a treatment plan.
- **Medical physicists** work with the doctor during treatment planning and delivery. They direct the work of the dosimetrists. They make sure that treatments are proper for each patient.

Will radiation make me sick?

There are side effects from radiation treatment. The side effects are based on the area of your body treated. For example, patients being treated to their abdomen or pelvis may feel nauseous. Ask your therapists what side effects you may have. Feeling tired during radiation treatment is a common side effect. Skin reactions from the radiation are also common. More information is included in your radiation therapy education folder.

Will I lose my hair?

If treatment is to any part of the body covered with hair, there is a chance that you could lose hair in that area. Based on the dose of radiation that you receive; hair loss can be permanent or temporary.

When will I see any side effects?

As a rule, about 2 weeks after the start of your treatment side effects may begin. More information is included in your folder.

Will I be radioactive?

No. The only time there is radiation is when the machine is turned on. You are safe to be around others.

What happens if I can't make it to one of my treatments?

Call the treatment machine where you are being treated. Speak with a therapist. It is advised that you do not miss any of your treatments. If you do need to cancel a visit, one will be added on to your treatment schedule to make up for the missed day.

How can I contact my doctor before I start treatment or in-between treatments?

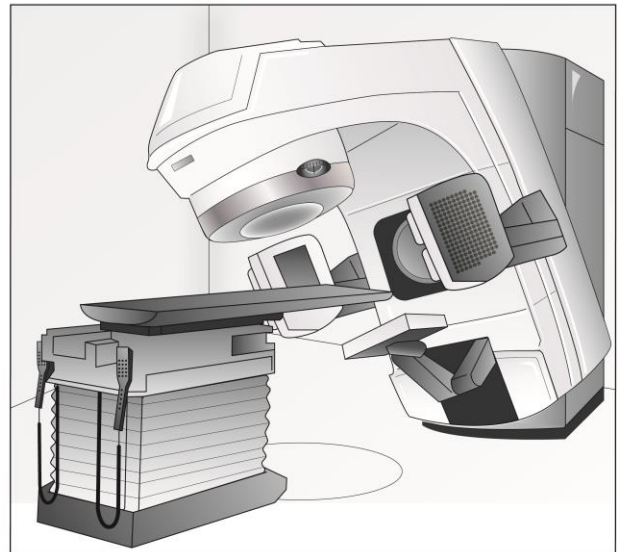
Call our department at **(608) 263-8500** to speak with your doctor or a nurse.

You will see your doctor once a week. The doctor will monitor your side effects and address any other concerns. This visit is usually after one of your treatments. You will **not** need to schedule another visit. The therapist will set you up with that each time. Plan on being in the clinic a little longer on those days.

What is a linac?

Linear accelerators are referred to as "linacs." A linac is a machine that delivers high-energy x-rays to treat certain diseases, most often cancer. The machine can rotate around you while on the treatment table. The

first treatment is normally 30-45 minutes. Treatments after that are about 15-30 minutes.



What happens during a treatment visit?

Arrive for your treatment in Radiation Oncology at the time you were given. Check in at the reception desk before your treatment. Then have a seat in the waiting room by your treatment machine.

You will be called into the room, and the therapist will explain the process in detail. You may be asked to remove some clothing or personal items.

The table will move up and in towards the machine. There are positioning lasers in the treatment room that the therapists will use to line you up on the table. This is to put you in the correct position. They will use the tattoos or marks that you were given at the CT to line you up.

The first day, the therapists will use an imager on the machine to take x-rays. Sometimes the machine moves when doing this. These x-rays will confirm that you are in the correct position. Changes may be made to your position before starting the treatment. Your radiation doctor will be

called to the unit to see the images and make sure everything is going as planned.

After the first day, the treatment itself will just take a few minutes, but you may be in the room for about 15-30 minutes total for set-up and treatment.

When the treatment is finished, the therapists will come into the room and help you off the table.

There is no pain. You will not see, feel, or hear the radiation. You will hear some background noise from the machine. The therapists will watch you with TV cameras and can always hear you. If at any time you need something, wave your hand or call out loudly. The therapist will stop the machine right away and come into the room.

In your last week of treatment, you will meet with your doctor. A follow-up visit will be made at this time if needed.

When to Call

Treatments are given Monday-Friday. If you need to reach the staff, call your treatment machine Monday through Friday between 8:00 and 4:00.

If you have any questions or problems once you are home, call the Radiation Oncology Clinic.

Who to Call

Treatment machines:

- **Room A: (608) 263-8503**
- **Room D: (608) 890-5288**
- **East Clinic: (608) 504-4180**

Radiation Oncology Clinic
(608) 263-8500

If the clinic is closed, the answering service will pick up the call. Ask for the radiation oncology doctor on call. Give your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7229