

Radiation Therapy at The Carlo Fidani Peel Regional Cancer Centre



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CREDIT VALLEY
THE CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL

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Introduction

Radiation therapy treats specific diseases, most commonly cancer. Radiation can shrink disease, slow its spread or may be used after surgery. It is important to remember that radiation is only one of several treatment options available. Surgery, chemotherapy or other treatments may be given along with radiation. Each person's journey is unique and no two people will have the same experience. Your health care team will discuss the available options and decide upon the most appropriate course of treatment in consultation with you.

There are several steps involved in radiation treatment;

- **Patient education and information**
- **Treatment planning**
- **Radiation treatment**
- **Weekly review**
- **Follow up**



Your health care team includes:

- **Radiation oncologist** A doctor specializing in treating cancer with radiation. The radiation oncologist prescribes the amount, location, and the specifics of radiation.
- **Radiation nurse** A nurse who works alongside the radiation oncologist. They have skills and knowledge in caring for individuals undergoing radiation therapy. Radiation nurses provide support during treatment & follow up.
- **Radiation therapist** Professionals who specialize in treatment planning and the delivery of radiation therapy. They are able to provide education and support during treatment.
- **Medical physicist** Professionals who oversee the accuracy and safety of the radiation machines and the software used in radiation therapy. They assist the radiation therapists in treatment planning and radiation delivery and review all treatment plans prior to treatment.
- **Dietitian** Professionals who provide nutritional assessment and education to help patients eat healthy. They offer diet suggestions to help manage the side effects of cancer treatment and provide guidance on the use of natural health products and oral nutrition supplements.
- **Receptionist** Individuals responsible for scheduling your daily radiation treatments. You will visit the reception desk daily to check in.
- **Volunteer** Individuals from the community who donate their time to assist our patients. Volunteers are able to provide support, answer some of your questions, and guide you through the department. They can also assist you to find resources in the patient resource centre. We are very fortunate to have many volunteers.

Patient Education and Information

When you visit the cancer centre you may have questions for your health care team. At any of your appointments, a member of the team is available to answer your questions. In addition, education will be provided before and during your radiation treatments. If you have questions, it is a good idea to write them down so that you will remember to ask them at your next appointment.

Please inform your health care team of any medications (prescribed or over the counter) or any natural health products (vitamins, minerals, herbs & supplements) you are taking. Certain products may interfere with the effectiveness of radiation treatments.

The Peel Regional Cancer Centre offers a variety of programs and classes to assist you. Patient information materials are available in the patient resource centre located on Level 1 of the cancer centre. You can also access reliable information on our website; www.cvh.on.ca/cancer. Ask a member of your health care team for more information about any of these services.

Treatment Planning

Treatment planning refers to the procedures required to prepare your treatment plan. This plan is used to deliver your daily treatments. The planning appointment takes approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. You may be asked to do some things to prepare for this appointment. It is very important to follow these instructions.

When you arrive, a radiation therapist will explain the procedure to you and take a digital photo of you for your treatment record. If you are pregnant or suspect you might be, please immediately inform the radiation therapist.

You may be asked to change into a hospital gown before you are taken into the planning room. You will be asked to lie down in the specific position required for your treatment. A specialized mould may be made to help keep you in the same position for each treatment.

You must be able to maintain this position for 20-30 minutes without moving. Please tell the radiation therapist if you are too uncomfortable. It is important for you to be able to maintain this position everyday for treatment. Try to relax, lie still, and breathe normally. This will help the radiation therapist obtain the best possible measurements. Once the treatment area is determined, the radiation therapist will use a marker to put marks on your skin and will record some measurements.

A CT scan, also called a CT simulator, may be used to plan your radiation. Small stickers will be placed on your skin prior to the scan. The marks and stickers will be replaced with small, freckle-sized, **permanent** tattoos at the end of the session. These tattoos will allow the radiation therapists to set

you up in the same position each day for your treatment. In some cases, the radiation therapist may make a tracing or map of the area. This tracing will then be used for daily positioning.

Your radiation therapist may also take photographs of the treatment area. These photos are for treatment purposes only and will be placed in your treatment record.

Your radiation treatment plan will be created from the information obtained at this appointment. Your radiation oncologist will review the plan prior to your treatment. This plan is also checked by a medical physicist prior to the start of your radiation treatment.

Your Appointments

Following your planning session, an appointment for your first radiation treatment will be arranged with you. If your first appointment is not booked before you leave, the receptionist will call you to arrange an appointment. A period of time is required between your planning appointment and your first radiation treatment to prepare your treatment plan. This time varies depending on the complexity of the treatment plan.

Your treatment will be delivered over multiple days and weeks. If you are unable to attend an appointment for any reason, please contact us at 905-813-4411. If you are unable to contact us, please have someone else contact us on your behalf.

Each day when you arrive for treatment, check in at the radiation therapy reception desk and present your health card. Have a seat in the waiting area until your name is called. If you would prefer not to have your name called out, please inform the reception area staff.

Sometimes radiation therapy machines require attention resulting in delays. When this occurs you may be at the cancer centre for a longer period of time than expected.

If you are coming with a volunteer driver and arrive early for your appointment, be prepared to wait until your scheduled time.

Radiation Treatment

Radiation does not hurt.

Some patients need to prepare for their radiation treatment appointments (e.g. fasting or having a full bladder). If this is required for your treatment, it is important to follow the instructions given to you.

Tell your radiation therapist immediately if you are pregnant or suspect you are.

Radiation cannot be seen, smelled, felt or tasted. It is like having an x-ray.

The radiation treatment appointment takes between 10-30 minutes. The majority of time is spent placing you in the correct position for treatment. The actual radiation is only on for a couple of minutes. During your treatment you will not feel anything. It is similar to having an x-ray. There is no smell, sight, taste, or feel associated with treatment. You may hear the machine making clicking or humming noises when it is turned on.

In order for radiation to be most effective, you must try to remain still throughout the treatment.

The radiation therapist leaves the room to deliver the treatment. He/she is able to see you on a camera and hear you on an intercom during the treatment.

Radiation does not make you radioactive.

The machine may rotate around you during the treatment. The radiation therapist is able to operate the machine from inside or outside the room. Once the treatment is complete, the machine will switch off automatically. It can also be switched off by the radiation therapists at any point during treatment, if the need arises. Although you may get accustomed to the sounds of the machine starting and stopping, please do not move until your therapist tells you that it is okay to do so.

It is important to note, there is no radiation left in your body following treatment. It is safe to be around your friends and family immediately after the treatment.



Side Effects of Radiation Therapy

Radiation treatment is used to destroy cancer cells. Radiation also affects normal cells, but the normal cells can recover better and faster. Side effects of radiation are the result of short term damage to your normal cells.

Each individual has a unique experience with radiation treatment. The specific side effects depend on the area of the body being treated and the amount of radiation delivered. Your radiation oncologist, nurse, and therapist will discuss potential side effects with you. They will also discuss recommended strategies for side effect management with you as the need arises. Specific pamphlets are available to help you understand and manage the various side effects from treatment.

Almost all side effects you experience from treatment will go away within one to four weeks after the completion of treatment.

Weekly Review

Once a week while you are on treatment you will have an appointment with the radiation oncologist and/or the radiation nurse. This is known as weekly review.

It is important for you to attend this appointment so your progress can be monitored. This appointment is pre-scheduled along with your radiation treatment appointment. The day and time your radiation oncologist is available will be shown on your weekly appointment schedule.

If you need to see a doctor or nurse on a day other than your review day, please speak to your radiation therapist. Someone is always available to see you.

During your last full week of treatment, you will be provided with information about what to expect after your treatment has finished.

Follow Up

By your last appointment, your follow-up plan will be discussed with you. This may be an appointment at the oncology clinic, it may be follow up with the physician who referred you, or it may be elsewhere. The specific plan will be determined by your radiation oncologist. If you are unsure of your follow up plan by your last day of treatment, please ask for it before you leave the radiation therapy department.

If you have any questions or concerns once you have completed your treatment, or if you need additional support, please contact the radiation therapy department at 905-813-4411.

