



# CARE INSTRUCTIONS

KAISER PERMANENTE

## Learning About External Beam Radiation Treatment

### Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions

Radiation treatment uses high-energy rays or radioactive material to kill cancer cells or to keep them from growing. In external beam treatment, a beam of radiation is aimed at the tumor from outside the body. This treatment is usually given 5 days a week, over the course of a few weeks. There may be other treatment schedules. For example, some schedules have treatments 2 times a day. How long your treatment lasts depends on the type of cancer you have.

One common form of external beam treatment is intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT). IMRT uses a precise amount of radiation that is carefully targeted at a tumor. This limits radiation exposure to healthy tissue. The treatment itself is painless.

External beam radiation treatment can cause some side effects. It can make the skin near the treated area sore. The skin may turn red or dark, like a burn. The treatment can cause fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Areas inside your body can get sore. For instance, your throat may hurt if the radiation is aimed there. Most side effects usually go away after treatment ends. But you may feel very tired for 4 to 6 weeks after your last treatment. Talk to your doctor about ways to treat the side effects. Skin changes may not go away.

When you find out that you have cancer, you may feel many emotions and may need some help coping. Seek out family, friends, and counselors for support. You also can do things at home to make yourself feel better while you go through treatment. Your doctor will tell you what activities you can do during treatment. Call the American Cancer Society (1-800-227-2345) or visit its website at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) for more information. You can also call the National Cancer Institute (1-800-422-6237) or visit its website at [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov).

## What can you expect?

- External beam treatment takes only a few minutes, but allow 30 minutes to an hour for each visit.
- You may need to put on a hospital gown or robe. Wear clothing that is comfortable and easy to take off and put on again later.
- The radiation therapist will mark the treatment spot with tattoos or tiny dots of ink. The radiation must focus on the same area every time. If the dots seem to fade between treatments, tell your radiation therapist.
- You may have shields, or blocks, between the machine and other parts of your body. The shields protect those parts of your body from radiation.
- You'll be asked not to move during treatment. If you're having radiation treatment to the head, you may wear a special mask over your face to keep your head still. If you keep still, then the radiation goes only where it is needed. You can breathe normally.
- Expect the radiation machine to make noises, such as humming and clicking. The sound may worry you, but the machine is under the therapist's control. The machine is checked often to make sure it works as it should. If you are nervous, tell the radiation therapist. Ask any questions you have.
- Talk to your doctor about what activities you can do before, during, and after treatments.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.kp.org>

Enter **Z105** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About External Beam Radiation Treatment.**"

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