

What To Know

About Brachytherapy (A Type of Internal Radiation Therapy)



“I asked questions. My doctor took the time to help my family and me understand what was going to happen.”

About the treatment:

- Brachytherapy uses radiation to destroy cancer cells and shrink tumors.
- The radiation source, which looks like seeds, ribbons, or wires, is put into your body.

Before treatment starts:

You will meet with your doctor to:

- Talk about your health and medical history.
- Get a checkup (physical exam). You will also have tests to take pictures of the cancer.
- Learn how brachytherapy can help you.
- Learn about any side effects you may have. These differ depending on where the radiation is placed.

- Ask and get answers to all your questions before starting treatment.

During treatment:

- Your doctor will place a small holder, such as a thin tube called a catheter, into your body. It is placed in or near the cancer cells. Sometimes an applicator or a balloon attached to a thin tube is used.
- Then the seeds, ribbons, or wires are put inside the small holder so that the radiation can reach and destroy cancer cells.
- Depending on the type of implant you receive, the radiation source may stay in place for minutes, hours, or days. Or if you receive a permanent implant, it will not be taken out.

Ask your doctor or nurse what side effects you should expect. Side effects depend on the part of your body being treated with radiation therapy. See the back of this sheet to order the **Radiation Therapy Side Effects Sheets** that can help you the most.

Types of brachytherapy:

Low-dose rate (LDR) implants	High-dose rate (HDR) implants	Permanent implants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ These implants stay in for hours or days. Often they stay in for 1 to 7 days and then are taken out. ■ You are likely to stay in a special room in the hospital. ■ You may need to limit time with visitors in the hospital, while the implant is in place. ■ Once the implant is removed, you are not radioactive and can be around people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ These implants stay in place for a few minutes at a time and are then taken out. Your entire visit will be longer, though, since it also takes time to prepare for the treatment. ■ The holder or catheter may stay in place or it may be put in place before each treatment. ■ You are likely to make daily trips to the hospital for your treatment. Or you may stay in the hospital. This depends on the type of cancer you have. ■ You can be around people after the implant is removed. You are not radioactive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ These implants stay in your body and are not removed. ■ Over time the radiation gets weaker, but the implants stay in place. ■ Your doctor or nurse will talk with you about what safety measures to take.
<p>Be sure to ask your doctor about special instructions to follow.</p>		

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. How can brachytherapy help me?
2. What type of brachytherapy do you recommend?
3. What side effects should I expect? How will these side effects be lowered or managed?
4. Is infertility a possibility for me? Would you give me the name of a fertility expert to meet with?
5. How often, and for how long, will I receive treatment?
6. What changes might I have after treatment? How long will these changes last?



Revised February 2012

How can we help?

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service

Phone: 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER)

Web: www.cancer.gov

Online Chat: www.cancer.gov/livehelp

NCI has a series of 9 Radiation Therapy Side Effects Sheets at:
www.cancer.gov/radiation-side-effects

