

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:

Here is what happens at most meetings. You will:

- Talk about your health and medical history.
- Get a checkup (physical exam). You may 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.
- See the back of this sheet to learn more about the type of brachytherapy that you will be getting.

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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 your 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. ■ Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn how often you will get treatment and how long it will last. This is different for different types of cancers. ■ 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.

Be sure to follow all special instructions from your doctor or nurse after these treatments.

Ask your doctor or nurse about side effects from this treatment.

The side effects you may have depend on the part of your body being treated.

There are fact sheets to help you learn how to manage side effects.

Free Services To Learn More

**National Cancer Institute
Cancer Information Service**

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

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

Online: www.cancer.gov

Chat Online: www.cancer.gov/help



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