Caring for Your Child
Radiation Treatment without General Anesthesia

How can I prepare my child for radiation treatment?

Before Treatment

Here are some important things you can do:

- Do not use lotions or creams anywhere on your child’s skin for 4 hours before the scheduled treatment.
- Your child may eat something before radiation treatment, as long as he is not receiving general anesthesia. You may also bring a snack to eat while your child is waiting or for after treatment. Please do not eat in the CHOP waiting area, as the younger children are not allowed to eat before their treatment. You may eat in the main waiting area.

The following are a few suggestions to prepare for your child’s visit:

- Your child will need to change into a hospital gown or shirt before the treatment. It is best to wear clothes that are easy for him to take on and off. It might also be helpful to have a change of clothes for your child and yourself.
- You may bring a favorite comfort item for your child.
- Feel free to bring books, music, video games or any other items that your child enjoys.
- All of the treatment rooms have music players, so your child may listen to music or audiobooks during his treatment. We also have music available for your child to choose. Listening to music or an audiobook during treatment can help your child to relax and make the time pass more quickly.
- Headphones and ear buds are not allowed during treatment.
- Most people spend up to 1 ½ hours in Radiation Oncology Department on each day of treatment. Treatments are usually given once a day, Monday through Friday, for a number of weeks.

What happens during radiation treatment?

Although everyone’s plan is different, this is generally what will happen during your treatment visit:

- When you arrive at the Radiation Oncology Department, stop at the front desk in the main waiting room. This is where you will register your child and get your parking ticket validated. Then you will move to the children’s waiting room area.
You may go to the treatment room with your child, but due to the amount of radiation being given, we will ask you to wait in the waiting room during the treatment. Only your child is allowed in the treatment room during the treatment.

Once your child is in the correct position, the therapist will go to an area right outside of the treatment room. This area is called the console area. After checking all the settings to make sure that the machine is working exactly as planned, the radiation therapist will turn on the machine.

The therapist will watch your child on a TV monitor during the treatment.

The therapist can talk to your child over an intercom system if needed. Your child may also give a hand signal by waving to the therapist, if he has a concern during treatment.

Your child will be asked to stay still and breathe normally during the treatment.

The radiation treatment machine will make clicking and whirring noises and sometimes sound like a vacuum cleaner as it moves.

The radiation therapist controls the movement of the machine.

External radiation treatments are painless, but lying on the table may cause some discomfort. Tell your child to let the radiation therapist know if he is uncomfortable. If your child feels sick, he should tell the therapist right away.

If your child needs you during the actual treatment, the therapist will let you know.

Even though the effects of radiation are powerful, your child will not become permanently radioactive. External radiation treatment affects cells only for a moment. It is safe for your child to be around other children and adults.

We will take images (X-ray or CT scans) during the radiation treatment to make sure your child is in the correct position. We will also take images if there is a change in the treatment field or plan. They are not used to measure your child’s response to the radiation.

If you have questions about anything that happens in the treatment room, ask your therapist to explain.

As soon as the treatment is over, you may join your child.

Although the radiation treatments are not painful, a few children may feel anxious before or during treatment. Child life specialists can offer ways for your child to cope with treatment. They can teach your child about the treatment and answer his questions in a way that he will understand. If your child needs medicine to stay calm and still, the oncology team will work with you and your team to develop a plan to decrease anxiety.

It can be difficult for you to see your child upset. It may be helpful to remember that treatments last a short time, and to focus on the benefit of the treatment for your child. The members of the radiation oncology team are here to provide support for you during this difficult time. Please don’t hesitate to ask if you have any questions or concerns.
About Treatment Visits

You will see the radiation oncologist at least once a week. This visit is called your On Treatment Visit or (OTV). These visits are important because they give the team the chance to:

- Check your child’s physical condition
- Discuss any side effects
- Answer any questions you may have about radiation treatment
- Schedule future treatments

If you have any questions during your child’s radiation treatments, you can contact the radiation oncology nurse practitioner or stop at the nurses’ station for assistance. You do not have to wait for your weekly visit to ask questions.

Follow-Up Care

A follow-up care visit will be scheduled after therapy is finished. Your child will see the radiation oncology team regularly. Your CHOP oncologist will also follow your child’s progress on a regular basis. Although you may be seeing other physicians, it is important for you and your child to continue to visit your radiation oncologist. This will help us to identify any radiation-related problems as early as possible. Your radiation oncologist will stay in touch with your other cancer specialists.

We strongly recommend that children receiving proton therapy to the brain have a neuropsychological evaluation before treatment begins and at specific follow-up periods after treatment has ended. Neuropsychological testing provides important information about your child’s cognitive development (thinking and processing information) after a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

We also recommend getting an assessment when you, another caregiver, or any adult in your child’s life notices that your child is struggling. Areas of difficulty include problems maintaining attention, difficulty with school or homework, and difficulty in social situations.
Important Information for Your Treatment Days

If you are late or having trouble getting to the hospital:

- It is important that you come to every therapy appointment and to be on time. Please call us as soon as you realize that you are going to be late or unable to come to your appointment. We will discuss the best option for you.
- We understand that you may have to juggle many appointments for your child. We have many child and adult patients who are scheduled for radiation therapy appointments. Every appointment slot is very valuable.
- Please call the radiation front desk at 215-662-3071. Give the number of the treatment machine or the name of the therapist who normally delivers your treatment. This information will help us to make sure the right people are notified.

If your child is feeling ill or you have an urgent concern:

- Call if your child is having radiation-related problems or concerns.
- **Always** call if your child has a fever and is scheduled for radiation that day or the next day.
  - It is also important to immediately inform your oncology team of any fever.
    - Fever of 101.3°F (38.5°C) once, or
    - Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) three times in a 24 hour period, taken at least 2 hours apart
- The decision to go ahead with treatment will be made by the radiation oncologist after discussion with your medical oncologist. Sometimes it is better that your child not have treatment if he is sick. Any missed days will be added to the end of the treatment schedule.

Important Phone Numbers

**CHOP Oncology:**
- 8:30am-5pm, 7 days a week (including holidays)
  - call the Oncology Phone Nurse at **215-590-2299**
- After 5pm
  - call the Main Hospital at 215-590-1000 and ask for the Oncology Fellow on call

**Penn/CHOP Radiation:**
- CHOP Front Desk/Pediatric Waiting Room: **215-615-5678**
- PACU Nurses’ Station: **215-615-5691**

If there is a problem with the machine and treatment needs to be rescheduled:

- Someone from the Radiation Oncology Department will call you.
- You will be asked to provide phone numbers where you can be reached. If you have a cell phone, please give this number also. Please make sure the contact information we have for you is correct in your child’s medical record.