

# Radiation therapy

## What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy is a common way to treat cancer. It's also called radiotherapy. This treatment uses a controlled dose of radiation to destroy cancer cells. It only works in the specific part of your body where the cancer is.

## Why do I need radiation therapy?

Doctors use radiation therapy to target and try to destroy cancer because your body cannot "fix" cancer by itself. Radiation therapy may help to:

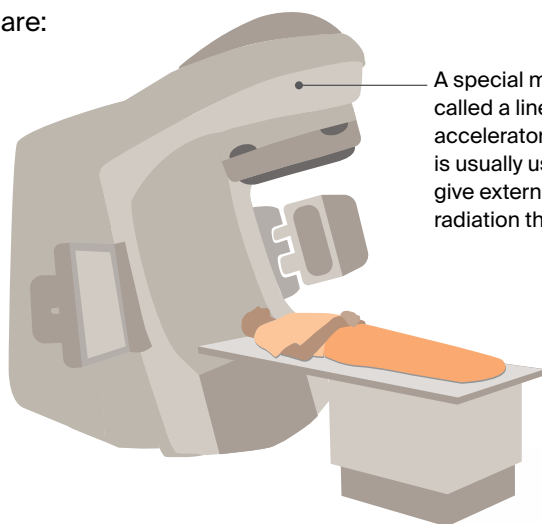
- cure the cancer
- shrink or stop the cancer from getting bigger
- control the spread of the cancer
- stop pain and other problems caused by the cancer.

## How do I have radiation therapy?

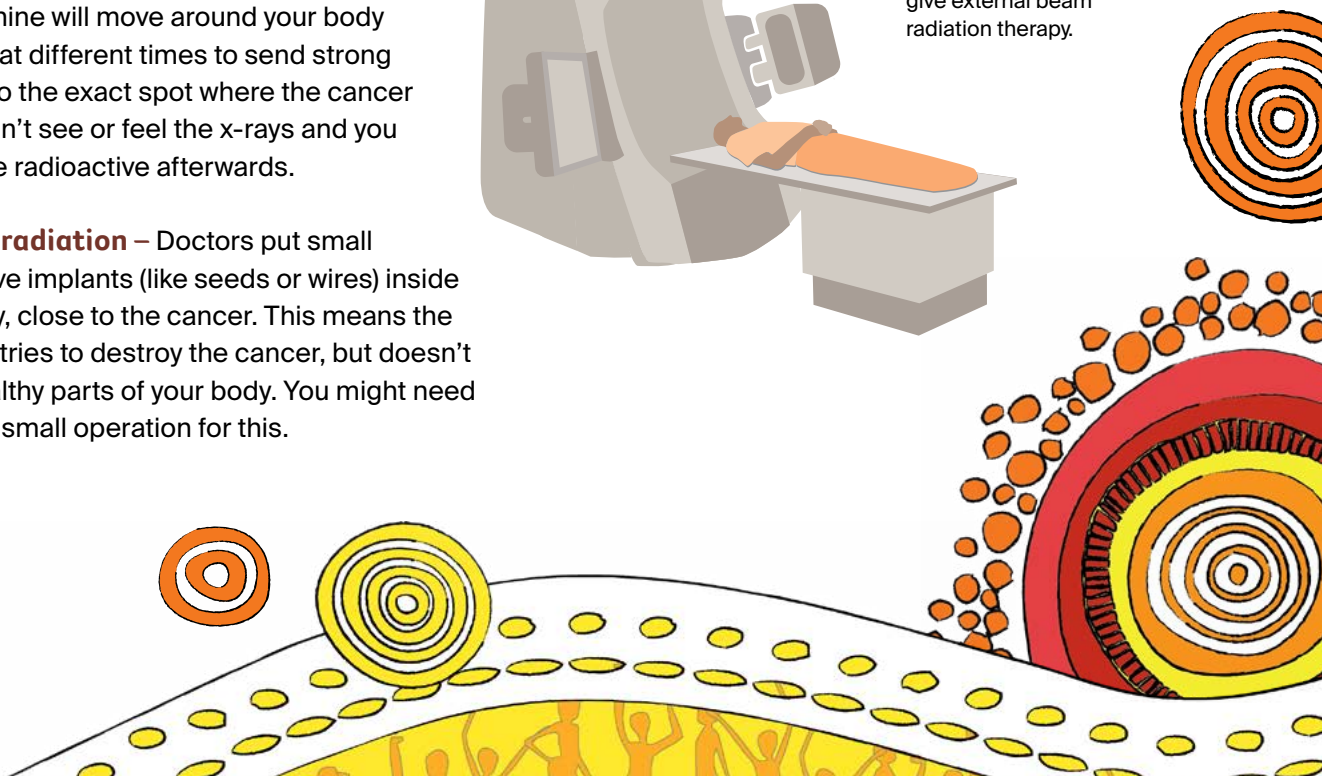
There are 2 types of radiation therapy that may be used, depending on the type of cancer you have. These are:

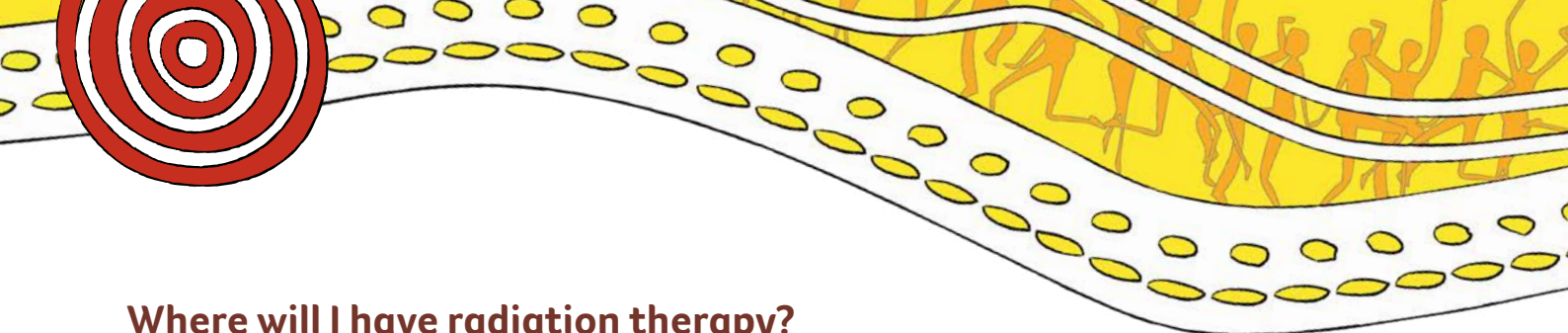
- **External beam radiation** – Doctors use a machine to target the cancer from outside your body (see picture). You lie still on a table. The machine will move around your body and stop at different times to send strong x-rays into the exact spot where the cancer is. You can't see or feel the x-rays and you will not be radioactive afterwards.
- **Internal radiation** – Doctors put small radioactive implants (like seeds or wires) inside your body, close to the cancer. This means the radiation tries to destroy the cancer, but doesn't harm healthy parts of your body. You might need to have a small operation for this.

It's important to go to all of your radiation therapy sessions. If you need help getting to appointments, tell your doctor, Aboriginal Health Service or Worker or call Cancer Council on 13 11 20.



A special machine called a linear accelerator (LINAC) is usually used to give external beam radiation therapy.





## Where will I have radiation therapy?

You will have radiation therapy at a treatment centre or a hospital. You will see a radiation doctor (called a radiation oncologist) and a radiation therapist (the health professional who operates the machine). They will work together to give you the radiation therapy in a safe way and reduce side effects. External beam radiation therapy is usually given Monday to Friday for a certain time. Your treatment team will talk to you about how many sessions you need.

## How will radiation therapy affect my body?

Radiation therapy needs to be strong to destroy the cancer. Sometimes it affects how you look and feel during the treatment. Your doctor will tell you what side effects you may have. Most side effects get better in 4 to 6 weeks.



A radiation therapy session usually takes about 30 minutes. You don't have to stay in hospital overnight but you may have to come back every day until your treatment is finished.

### What you might feel after radiation therapy

You may feel very tired (fatigue), have dry, red or itchy skin and/or lose hair on the part of the body where radiation is given. Other side effects will depend on where the radiation is given.

Part of the body given radiation	Side effects you might have
chest	cough
head or neck	dry mouth; thick or sticky saliva
top part of your belly	upset stomach
lower part of your belly	bowel or bladder issues; women may have women's issues

### More information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit [aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au](http://aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au)
- Visit [menzies.edu.au/cancer](http://menzies.edu.au/cancer)
- Ask your local Aboriginal Health Service



Cancer Council NSW has adapted this fact sheet from a Menzies School of Health Research resource that was developed in consultation with a clinical advisory group and an Indigenous consultation group. It has been reviewed by cancer experts and Aboriginal people with an experience of cancer.

The design features elements from the artwork *Healing Journey* by Carissa Paglino. Carissa was born and raised in Awabakal country (Newcastle) and is a descendant of the Wanaruah people from the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW. Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol (below) was designed by Marcus Lee, a descendant of the Karajarri people.



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

