



Réseau de  
cancérologie  
Rossy

Rossy  
Cancer  
Network

# Your Radiotherapy Journey at the McGill University Health Centre

## A Guide to Preparing for Your Treatments



**A patient-friendly book for:**

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This booklet is provided to help you understand and prepare for your radiotherapy treatments. Share it with your loved ones and bring it with you throughout your treatment. Write any questions down on the last page of the booklet and ask us at your next appointment.





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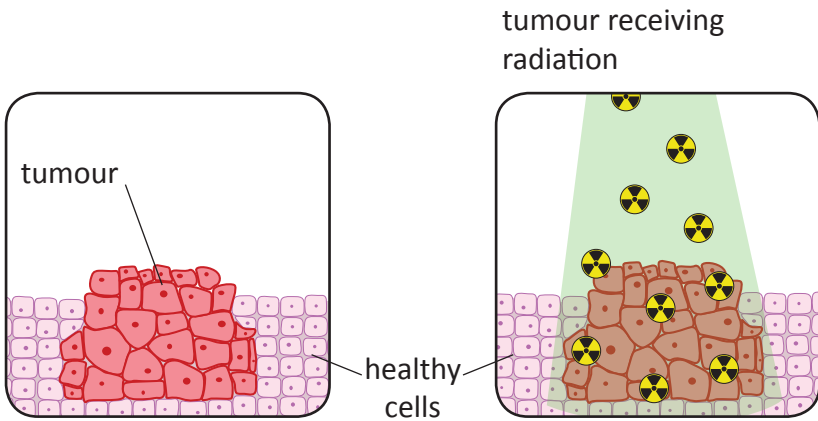
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## General Information

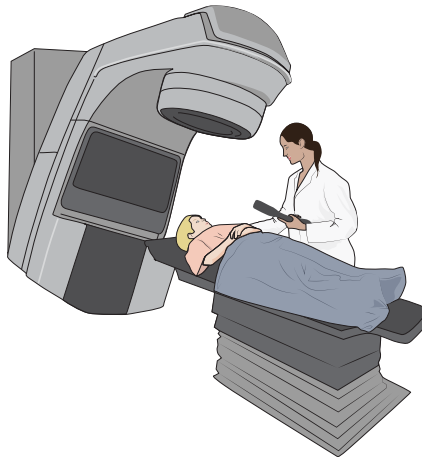
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# What is Radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy x-rays to treat cancer.



Our body is made up of many types of cells. Each cell works in its own way to keep us healthy. Cancer forms when a group of cells start to grow out of control.



Radiotherapy works by using high doses of x-ray radiation to kill cancer cells. Radiotherapy is given only to the part of your body that needs treatment. The x-ray radiation is produced by a large machine similar to the one shown in the picture above.

# Your Journey

## Step 1: Your First Appointment

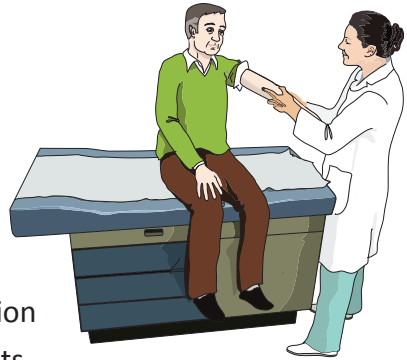
Your radiotherapy journey begins with your consultation with your radiation oncologist.



Your radiation oncologist is:



Dr. \_\_\_\_\_



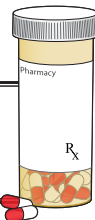
Your radiation oncologist will:

- Review your medical history
- Perform a physical examination
- Review the results of any tests you have had

Your radiation oncologist will also explain your treatment plan, including the:

- Number of treatments \_\_\_\_\_
- Frequency of treatments \_\_\_\_\_
- Length of each treatment \_\_\_\_\_
- Possible start date \_\_\_\_\_
- Preparation for treatment and possible side effects

Please bring a list of any medications that you are taking to this appointment.

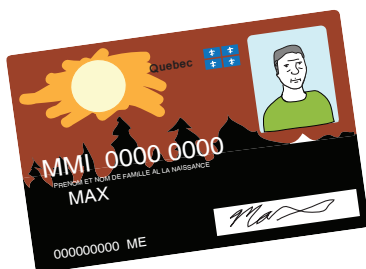


# Your Journey

## Checking in

Each time you visit the Department of Radiation Oncology for an appointment you should register at one of the check-in kiosks.

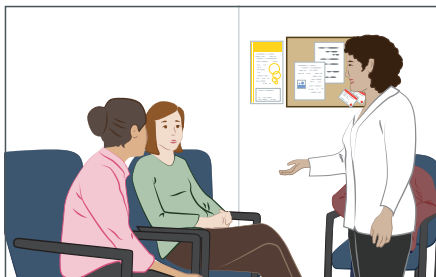
At the Montreal General Hospital you can check-in by scanning the barcode on your RAMQ card.



There are two waiting rooms at the Montreal General Hospital. Please follow the directions displayed on the screen when you check in.

Once you have checked in for your appointment, please wait in the waiting room until you are called.

When the technologists are ready to treat you, you will be called into the treatment room. You may be asked to change into a hospital gown.



If you prefer, you can of course check in at the reception desk.

### Step 2: CT Simulation

Once you and your radiation oncologist have decided on the best treatment plan for you, the next step will be a CT simulation scan.

The CT simulation is a scan of the part of your body that will be treated with radiotherapy. You will be scanned in the position that you will be in for your treatments. The purpose of the CT simulation is to provide your treating team with pictures of your body. They will use these pictures to plan your treatment.



During your CT simulation, your radiotherapy technologists may use special equipment to help position you in a way that can be repeated for each treatment.

The technologists may mark your skin with tiny tattoos (smaller than a freckle). These tattoos are permanent and will be used as reference points during your treatments.

## Your Journey

### Step 3: Treatment Planning

Your radiation oncologist will prepare your treatment plan (the technical aspects of your treatments) with a team of health professionals. They will use your CT simulation scan and other information about your disease to do this.



You should expect a delay between your CT simulation and the beginning of your radiotherapy treatment. This is normal. Be assured you will start within a time that is acceptable for your particular situation.

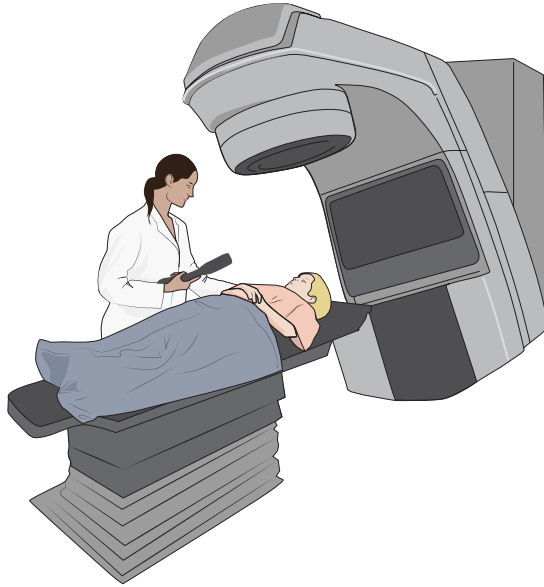
**When your treatment plan is ready you will receive a phone call to schedule your treatments.**



If you have any questions or concerns while you are waiting to start your treatment, please call the patient liaison at (514) 934-1934 ext. 43928.



### Step 4: First Treatment Session



Your first radiotherapy session will be the longest. It may last more than one hour. Your radiotherapy technologists will position you in the same position you were in during your CT simulation. They will take several measurements and x-ray images to check that your position is correct.

The technologists may use a marker to draw lines (called marks) on your skin to outline your treatment area. These marks are not permanent. Please do not wash them off.

Radiotherapy does not hurt.  
You will not become radioactive.

# Your Journey

## Step 5: Treatments

The final number of treatments will be decided by your radiation oncologist. Patients receive one treatment per day (Monday to Friday) over a number of weeks.



Your daily treatments will be similar to your first treatment but will most likely take less time. Most of the time is spent positioning you for your treatment and verifying that the position is correct.

Depending on the type of treatment that you are receiving the technologists may take x-ray images to fine tune your position.

During your treatments you will be alone in the treatment room.

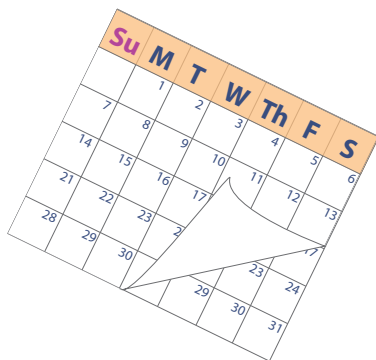
Your technologists will be watching you by video camera. They can hear you and can speak to you by intercom when needed.

If you can not make a treatment for any reason please call your technologists.

Feel free to speak to your technologists if you have any questions or concerns.

## Step 6 : Regular Checkups

Over the course of your treatment you will be seen regularly by our medical staff to check on your progress.



Your regular check-up is a good time to ask your radiation oncologist your questions. We suggest that you write down your questions and bring them to this appointment.

## Treating Team

During your radiotherapy journey, a team of health-care professionals will work together to ensure that you receive the best possible care. You may meet members of this team throughout your radiotherapy journey.

Ask your team any questions that you might have.

**They are here to help.**



### Your Radiation Oncologist

Your radiation oncologist is the doctor who is responsible for your radiotherapy treatment. He or she will discuss your treatment with you and monitor your progress. If needed, your radiation oncologist may change your treatment to make it as effective as possible. Through all the steps of your radiotherapy journey, he or she will work closely with the rest of your treating team to make sure that you receive the best possible care.

### Radiation Oncology Nurses

The radiation oncology nurses can listen to your concerns, answer your questions, provide support, and manage your treatment side effects. They are available before, during, and after treatments, until you have fully recovered from all side effects. They can also link you to resources in the hospital and the community.

### **Radiation Oncology Technologists**

Radiation oncology technologists work at the radiotherapy planning and treatment machines. They see you daily, help set you up in the same position as the CT simulation, check your marks and give you your treatments. They can answer most of your questions and are a link with the other members of your treating team.

### **Medical Physicists**

Medical physicists are scientists who are trained to understand how radiation interacts with your body. They are responsible for the safety of your radiotherapy treatment. They also take care of the radiotherapy machines to make sure that they meet the highest national and international standards for accuracy and safety.

### **Dosimetrists**

Dosimetrists are specialized radiation oncology technologists who plan your radiotherapy treatment using the pictures taken during your CT simulation scan. They work together with your radiation oncologist and with the medical physics team to create a computerized treatment plan that is just for you.

### **Nutritionists**

A clinical nutritionist may meet with you, depending on your treatment plan. He/she will help you make any changes to your diet during treatments if needed.

# Treating Team

## **Social Workers**

Social workers are there to support you and your family during your radiotherapy treatments. They can provide counselling and can help arrange other supportive services.

## **Receptionists**

The receptionists are most likely the first people you will meet when you come to our department. They can assist you with check-in, booking appointments, forms and parking passes.

## **Patient Liaison**

The patient liaison is your contact during the planning phase of your treatment — the time between CT simulation and first treatment. He/she will call you when your treatment plan is ready and you may call him/her if you have any concerns.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers are there to help make your visits to the hospital more comfortable. They are usually in the waiting room. They will be happy to help guide you and find the right person to answer your questions or concerns.

## Side Effects

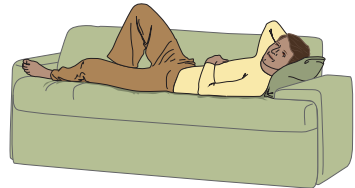
You may or may not experience some side effects during your treatment. This is normal. Your radiation oncologist will discuss with you what to expect.

### **What type of side effects can I expect?**

Side effects are related to the area of the body that is being treated. Common side effects may include fatigue and skin irritation. You will receive more information for possible side effects before your treatment begins.

**If you are having any side effects please speak with your treating team.**

- Most side effects are temporary. They can start at any time during your treatment and improve in the weeks after the end of your treatment.
- Some side effects may start after your treatment is finished.



### **Will I feel tired?**

Radiotherapy can make you feel more tired than usual. Listen to your body and rest if needed. If you are able, continue your normal activities. Some people are able to continue working, others can not. If tiredness is a problem, tell your radiation oncologist, nurse or technologist.

### **What can I do if I feel overwhelmed?**

Feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, or of difficulty to cope are normal. Each person has a different way of dealing with difficult situations. Please tell your treating team if you have any of these feelings.

Ask us your questions;  
we are here to help!

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Can radiotherapy affect my lifestyle?**

During your radiotherapy treatment, you can perform most of your daily activities. Mild physical activity such as walking is encouraged and may be helpful. If you go out into the sun, make sure you are well protected with proper clothing. Once you start treatment you should try to avoid missing treatments for any reason. You should not plan to go on vacation until your treatments are complete.



### **Does the treatment hurt?**

Treatments do not hurt. You will not feel anything during the treatment.

### **Will I be radioactive?**

Radiotherapy will not make you radioactive and you can safely be around other people, including children.

### **How will my doctor know if my treatment is working?**

Your doctor will meet with you regularly during your treatment to evaluate your progress. The radiotherapy may not produce an effect until after all your treatments are finished.

### **Will I be able to wash or shower as normal?**

It is very important not to wash off the marks, but it is OK to have a bath or shower. Use a mild soap and pat your skin dry, do not rub it. Do not shave the area that is being treated. Do not use cream right before your daily treatment unless instructed otherwise.





## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Will I need a special diet?**

Depending on the part of your body that is being treated, it is possible that you will require a special diet. If this is the case, you will be sent to a nutritionist in the Department of Radiation Oncology who will make a diet plan for you.

If you have any questions, you can ask for an appointment with our nutritionist who will guide you.

### **Transportation and Accommodation**

There may be resources in your community to help with transportation and accommodation. If either of these is a concern, please ask to speak with a social worker.



### **Parking**

There is a reduced parking fee for patients who come for **daily** radiotherapy treatments. Please ask at the reception desk.

### **Insurance papers**

Please ask your doctor if you have any insurance papers that need to be filled out.

### **What happens when all my treatments are finished?**

When all your treatments are finished, you will be given a follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist.

You can also call us if you have any side effects or require further assistance.

## Resources

The Department of Radiation Oncology is located at the D5 level (5th floor D wing) of the Montreal General Hospital.

The Radiation Oncology reception is located at D5-400.



Main number ..... (514) 934-8040

Patient liaison ..... (514) 934-1934 ext. 43928

Nutritionist ..... (514) 934-1934 ext. 42538

Social services ..... (514) 934-8027

### **Cedars CanSupport**

Cedars CanSupport supports cancer patients and their families, throughout their journey. A wide range of free and bilingual services are provided by a team of professional staff and trained volunteers.

**Website** ..... cansupport.ca

**Email** ..... cansupport.mgh@muhc.mcgill.ca

### **Telephone**

Montreal General Hospital: ..... (514) 934-1934 ext. 42314

Royal Victoria Hospital: ..... (514) 934-1934 ext. 31666

### **Financial Help**

Canadian Cancer Society ..... (514) 255-5151

### Patient's Committee

The patient's committee is a dedicated group of elected patient representatives who are available to help those who use the MUHC hospitals, clinics and services.

Website [muhc.ca/page/patientscommittee](http://muhc.ca/page/patientscommittee)

Email [patients.comm@muhc.mcgill.ca](mailto:patients.comm@muhc.mcgill.ca)

Telephone (514) 934-1934 ext. 42409  
.....

### MUHC Patient Education Office

Copies of this document and other patient education material are available at the website of the MUHC Patient Education Office.

Website [muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://muhcpatienteducation.ca)  
.....

## Your Checklist

During your radiotherapy treatments you will receive the following documents:



- ☐ Quebec Oncology Passport
- ☐ Canadian Cancer Society Radiation Therapy Guide
- ☐ Cedars CanSupport information sheet
- ☐ Recommendations to follow during treatment
- ☐ When Radiotherapy Treatment Ends

### You may also need:

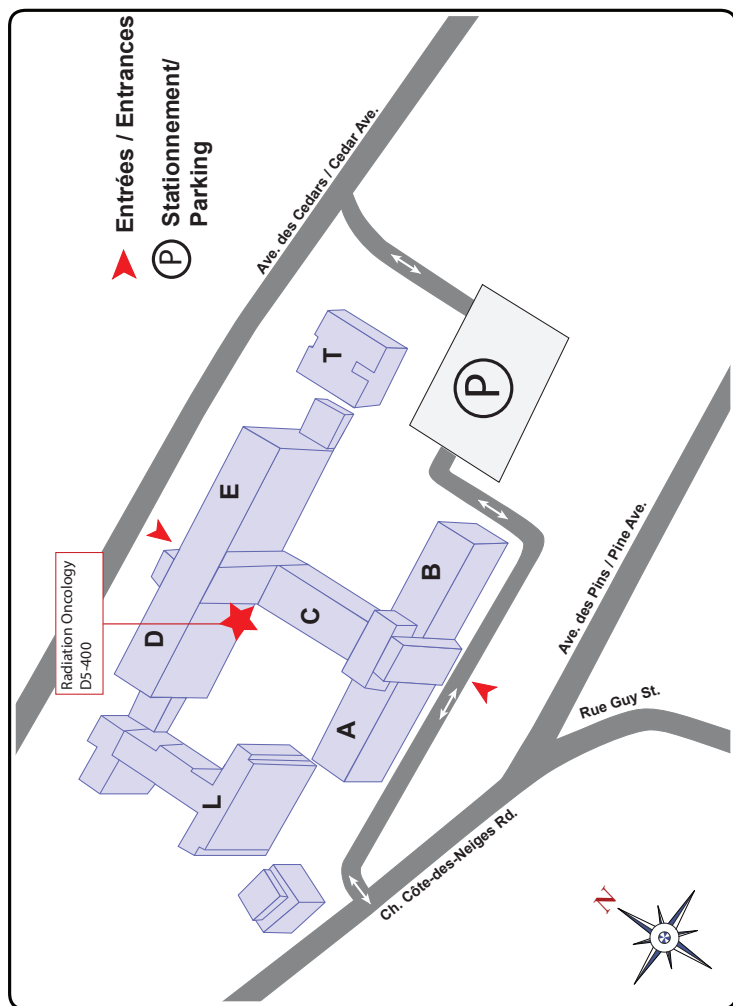
### Where do I get it / Who do I ask?

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Parking pass .....             | Receptionist                               |
| Insurance/work forms .....     | Receptionist                               |
| Transportation form .....      | Radiation Oncology Social Worker           |
| Special diet information ..... | Radiation Oncology Nutritionist            |
| Hospital map .....             | Available on the last page of this booklet |

## Your Notes



# Hospital Map



**Hôpital général de Montréal – Montreal General Hospital**  
 1650 Ave. des Cedars / Cedar Ave. Montreal, H3G 1A4.



**Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill**

**McGill University  
Health Centre**



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This document was prepared by the Rossy Cancer Network in collaboration with the:

Jewish General Hospital Department of Radiation Oncology  
McGill University Health Centre Department of Radiation Oncology  
McGill University Health Centre Department of Medical Physics  
Department of Oncology at the St. Mary's Hospital Center  
McGill University Health Centre Patient Education Office

We would also like to thank the oncology and radiation oncology patients and staff who provided valuable help and feedback.

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## **IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ**

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional health care practitioner, or to substitute for medical care. Contact a qualified health care practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



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de santé McGill



McGill University  
Health Centre



Hôpital général juif  
Jewish General Hospital



Centre hospitalier de St. Mary  
St. Mary's Hospital Centre



This material is also available on:

St. Mary's Hospital Center [smhc.ca](http://smhc.ca)

Jewish General Hospital [jgh.ca/en/radiationoncology](http://jgh.ca/en/radiationoncology)

The MUHC Patient Education Portal [muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://muhcpatienteducation.ca)

