Preparing for Radiation: Simulation and Treatment

The first day of radiation therapy can feel overwhelming. This is normal. The following is information to help you feel more prepared and reduce some of your anxieties.

Where to go and how to get there

Ensure that you have the correct address and know which building you need to be in. The Radiation Oncology Department in most centers is on the lowest level of the building due to shielding. Many times, it is located below ground.

Prior to your visit ask about parking. Some facilities offer valet parking. Depending on your treatment center, parking may be free or discounted when you are coming for your daily treatments. Find out where and how to get the parking validated. If you are taking public transportation, map out your route in advance. Find out where the closest bus stop or train stop is.

If you need wheelchair assistance, find out if there is someone there to help you or if you should plan to have someone come with you.

What to bring with you

You may want to pack a bag to bring with you for radiation each day. There is a chance that you will be there longer than expected and it can be helpful to have a distraction to pass the time. These can include:

- Comfortable clothes – robe to go over gown.
- Non-slip socks or easy slip-on shoes.
- Music to listen to. Most treatment rooms are equipped with a sound system.
- A book or magazine to read.
- Essential oils for relaxation.
- Notepad and pen to take notes when you see your care team.
- Snacks or lunch.
- Stress ball or other items that may help you to relax.

Preparation for Simulation

Prior to starting treatment, you will have a simulation appointment. During this appointment you will get into the position you will be in everyday for treatment with the immobilization devices and have imaging done. This appointment is used to map your treatment plan. To prepare for your simulation you will be given specific instructions depending on the area of your body that is being treated. You made need to:

- Complete a bowel preparation.
- Fill or empty your bladder.
- Follow specific diet instructions (no eating after a certain time).
- Take medications prior to appointment.
- Practice breathing exercises.
- Practice holding still or bringing arm above head.

Also, women should be prepared to take a pregnancy test when you come for simulation. Most facilities will require a pregnancy test within 7 days of simulation. This is often times given right before your simulation.
You will want to start thinking about what time of day is ideal for your daily treatment times. In some instances, you will make your treatment schedule the day of your simulation. Other times you may make your schedule over the phone after your simulation or it may be made on a weekly basis depending on your facility.

**Preparation for Treatment**

Your care team should give you the instructions prior to your treatment. These may be similar to the instructions you had for simulation.

Patients role in the treatment process:

- Arrive on time for all treatment sessions. If you are stuck in traffic, having difficulty getting to treatment, or need to cancel your appointment you should call your team and let them know.
- Ask questions and tell us your concerns.
- Talk to therapists or nurses about side effects you are experiencing.
- Eat a healthy diet or suggested diet from your care team.
- Talk with the social worker about transportation, support, and coping with cancer.
- Maintain your weight – minimal gain or loss is ideal. Ask to talk with the dietitian.
- Care for any skin reactions that may occur. Your team will give you skin care instructions.

When you arrive in the department for your treatment you can expect to either do a self-check-in at a kiosk or check-in at a front desk with the receptionist. You may be asked to fill out paperwork or do a weekly insurance verification. If there is anything you are unsure of please ask. Your care team is there to help answer all of your questions. Be prepared to ask questions. There is no bad question.

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