Ask a Radiation Oncologist: 
Radiation Therapy for 
Gastrointestinal (GI) Cancers

RT Answers YouTube Live Event: May 24, 6 pm ET/3 pm PT

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For more information, visit RTAnswers.org
Format for Tonight

- Panelists will give overview & answer common questions.
- Submit written questions in the YouTube chat
- Recording will be available online in 24 hours
Today’s discussion is informational only and should not be used in place of advice specific to your condition from your medical professional.

We will discuss treatments including surgery, chemotherapy and others. We encourage you to talk to other specialists, where appropriate, about other treatments you are considering.
Types of GI cancers we will discuss tonight:

Rectal Cancer & Anal Cancer
What is a lower GI cancer?

What is the difference between anal cancer and rectal cancer?

Why does the distinction between the two cancers matter?
What causes rectal and anal cancers?

How are lower GI cancers diagnosed?

A colonoscope fully inserted into the colon via the anus and rectum.
What happens after the cancer is found?
Is there a way to prevent lower GI cancers or catch cancer earlier?

Should I change my diet or take supplements?
Treatment for Rectal Cancer
Doctors & Treatments for Rectal Cancer

- Which doctors are involved with patients with rectal cancers?

- Which types of treatments are offered by each physician?
Treatments for Rectal Cancer

• How do doctors know which treatment(s) is best for me?

• Which treatment is first?
Treatments for Rectal Cancer

• Does everyone get chemotherapy, radiation and surgery?
Radiation Therapy

- What is radiation therapy?
- How does radiation therapy work?
- How often is radiation therapy given?
  - Why does it need to be given every day?
Radiation Therapy

• Why would patients get 2 treatments at the same time (chemotherapy and radiation therapy)?
  • Does that make side effects worse?

• What if the cancer shrinks?
Treatment for Anal Cancer
Treatment for Anal Cancer

• How is anal cancer treated?

• Why do most patients get chemotherapy and radiation therapy, but not surgery?

https://twitter.com/winshipatemory/status/1059461668676210688
https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/your-implanted-port
Side Effects

- What types of short-term side effects can be expected from radiation therapy to the pelvis?

- Are there things that can be done to minimize side effects?

- What long-term side effects are associated with treatment?
Radiation Therapy

- How do we know that the treatment is working?
  - What do we check on the tumor?

- What treatment options are available if the cancer returns?

- Can radiation be given more than once?
Audience Questions & Additional Discussion
COVID-19
Cancer patients may have an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and more severe disease if infected. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19.

mRNA COVID-19 vaccines may be administered to people with underlying medical conditions provided they have not had a severe or immediate allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine.” These guidelines also apply to cancer patients.

The mRNA COVID-19 vaccines do not include any virus, and there is no risk of contracting the infection from the vaccine. (Cont.)
Patients who have cancer, as well as those who have received treatment for cancer, may be immune compromised, but these patients may still receive COVID-19 vaccines as long as there is no increased risk of reaction to any of the components of the vaccine.

ASTRO encourages cancer patients who are actively receiving treatment such as radiation therapy to consult with their oncologists about the timing for vaccination, injection location and any unique considerations relevant for their treatments. Individuals with a prior history of cancer who are not in active treatment are encouraged to seek vaccination whenever it is made available to them.
Radiation Therapy for Cancers of the Colon, Rectum and Anus

Colorectal cancer is the third most diagnosed cancer in the United States. Radiation therapy is often used to treat these cancers by killing cancer cells while preserving your normal organs. Treatment may also involve surgery and medication. These treatments are customized to each patient depending on location, type and extent of cancer as well as an individual's other medical problems.
Patient Stories

David Goff

In 2016, while on active duty, David Goff began to experience fatigue and later abdominal pain. In 2018, he was officially diagnosed with colon cancer. Read how David and his doctor came to his diagnosis and treatment decisions.

READ HIS STORY

Thad Lurie
Head and Neck Cancer
Years Diagnosed: 2019
Hometown: Broomfield, Colorado

Heather Brinkerhoff
Pancreatic Cancer
Years Diagnosed: 2019
Hometown: Manila Park, California

More Stories

Patients and caregivers have shared stories of their experience with cancer in order to help others. Read the stories below or share your story.

- Bladder Cancer
- Breast Cancer
- Caregiver
- Colon Cancer
- Head and Neck Cancer
- Lung Cancer
- Pancreatic Cancer
- Prostate Cancer
- Sarcoma
- Skin Cancer
Thank you.

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