

Questions to Ask About Radiation Safety

Radiation is a safe, highly effective cancer treatment. However, because radiation is invisible and works inside your body, it can be hard to put your trust into a treatment you can't see, touch or smell.

Each radiation therapy treatment team has many safety checks to ensure that each treatment is given as planned. However, some patients and caregivers have very technical questions about radiation therapy. It is perfectly acceptable to have questions about how your radiation treatment works, how accurate the targeting is, side effects you may experience and the safety of the treatments.

For those interested in the technical aspects of radiation, here are some questions you may want to ask your radiation oncologist about the quality assurance at the clinic where you will be receiving therapy.

Training/Education Questions

- Is my radiation oncologist certified by the American Board of Radiology (ABR)? When does his or her certification expire?
- What are the certifications and qualifications of the medical physicist?
- Do the doctor and physicist review each patient's plan? How often?
- Do the staff here participate in multidisciplinary tumor boards?
- Do all staff regularly participate in continuing medical education?
- Tell me about the staff training given before using new technologies.



Treating Planning Questions

- Who is involved in planning my radiation treatment?
- How is the treatment plan checked to make sure it is best for me?
- What procedures do you have in place so that the treatment team is able to treat me safely?
- How can I be assured that my treatment is being done correctly every day?
- What is the difference between a medical error and a side effect?

Questions for During Treatment

- What kinds of safety checks do you perform each day?
- How often does the medical physicist check that the various machines involved during my treatment are working properly?

Questions to Ask After I Finish Treatment

- If I have side effects after my treatment, who can I call? You? My primary care doctor?
- I have a question about a radiation treatment I had many years ago. Who should I call?

General Questions

- If the equipment isn't working and my treatment is delayed or postponed, who checks that it is safe to use again? And will this delay affect my cancer?
- Do you have weekly chart rounds where you review patient-related information in peer review?
- Will you take imaging scans regularly during my treatment to verify position of my treatment? Who reviews those scans?