Being prepared and understanding radiation therapy can help lessen some of the stress surrounding your treatment. Ask your oncologist, doctor or nurse about the risks and benefits of radiation therapy and any other questions you have about your treatment.

What is radiation therapy?
Radiation therapy uses X-rays to destroy or injure cancer cells so they cannot multiply. Radiation therapy can be used to treat the primary cancer or advanced cancer.

It may be the only treatment used, or used in combination with surgery and/or chemotherapy. It can also be used to reduce the size of the cancer and relieve pain, discomfort or other symptoms.

Why is radiation therapy given?
Radiation therapy may aim to:
- **cure.** Some cancers can be cured by radiation therapy alone or combined with other treatments.
- **control.** Radiation therapy can control some cancers by making them smaller or stopping them from spreading.
- **relieve symptoms.** If cure is not possible, radiation therapy may be used to reduce cancer symptoms and prolong a good quality of life.

When is radiation therapy used?
Radiation therapy may be the main treatment, or may be used to assist another treatment. Adjunctive radiation therapy may be used to shrink the cancer before surgery, or after surgery, to stop the growth of any remaining cancer cells. In some cases it is used with chemotherapy.

How is radiation therapy given?
Radiation therapy is given from outside (external beam) or inside the body (brachytherapy). In external beam radiation therapy, a machine directs radiation at the cancer and surrounding tissue. In internal radiation therapy, radioactive material is put in thin tubes and placed in your body near the cancer.

How long is a course of treatment?
Your treatment will depend on what sort of cancer you have, where it is, its size, your general health and other cancer treatments you may have had. Some people need only one treatment, while others need radiation therapy five days a week for several weeks. If you have internal radiation therapy the implants may be left in place for a few minutes, one to six days or permanently.

Does radiation therapy hurt?
External radiation therapy won’t hurt. You won’t see or smell the radiation, however you may hear a buzzing sound when the machine is on. You will NOT be radioactive. It is safe to be in contact with other people, including pregnant women and children, when you are having treatment and afterwards.

During internal radiation therapy you may experience a little discomfort from the implant, however you should not have any severe pain or feel ill. While your radioactive implant is in place, it may send some radiation outside your body. There will be limits on visitors while your implant is in place.

What are the possible side-effects?
Side-effects vary and will depend on which area of your body is being treated. Possible side-effects include:
- fatigue (tiredness)
- dry, red or itchy skin
- swelling
- loss of appetite
- nausea (feeling sick)
- digestive problems
- hair loss
- dry or sore throat or mouth
- cough or shortness of breath.

Most side-effects can be managed and will gradually disappear once your treatment has finished.

Will radiation therapy affect my fertility?
Having radiation therapy in areas near your reproductive organs can affect your fertility temporarily or permanently. Discuss this possibility with your doctor or specialist.

Remember, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact your doctor.

Where can I get reliable information?
Cancer Council 13 11 20
Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

Cancer Council Australia website
www.cancer.org.au