

about breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. The good news is, many breast cancers can be cured. Cancer Care of Western New York offers advanced radiation treatment techniques that maximize your chance of being cured, while minimizing your risk of possible side effects. Our doctors have successfully treated hundreds of women with breast cancer. Now, we want to help you continue to have a healthy, productive life.

The Breast

In women, the breasts are made of fat, milk glands and connective (fibrous) tissue. They also contain tiny ducts that connect the milk glands to the nipples.

Signs and Symptoms

Most breast cancers are discovered at an early stage.

Symptoms of breast cancer include:

- An abnormal mammogram
- A new lump in your breast or underarm
- Nipple discharge
- Pain in the nipple area
- Changes in the appearance of the nipple
- Changes in the skin of the breast, including thickening, swelling, irritation or dimpling



Screening and Diagnosis

Breast cancer is often found through a mammogram, a breast examination by a physician, or a self-breast exam. If your physician thinks you may have breast cancer, you may be sent for ultrasonography, an MRI scan or a breast biopsy, which can offer a definitive diagnosis.

Surgical Treatment

There are two main surgical techniques for breast cancer—a mastectomy and a lumpectomy. If you have a mastectomy, a surgeon will remove your breast tissue down to the chest wall, including the nipple and area around the nipple. If you have a lumpectomy, the surgeon will only remove the abnormal area of tissue from your breast, along with some of the normal tissue that surrounds it.

Radiation Therapy Treatment

At Cancer Care of Western New York, we are proud to offer the latest radiation treatment techniques, including advanced High-Dose-Rate (HDR) brachytherapy. Our goal is to deliver a high dose of radiation to the specific area, without harming the surrounding healthy tissues. With state-of-the-art technology, we can maximize the destruction of cancer cells and your potential for a cure, while minimizing your risk of side effects and chance of a recurrence.

The first step is to develop a customized radiation treatment plan just for you. This plan will include either whole breast radiation, or partial breast radiation.

Whole Breast Radiation

Whole breast radiation involves a machine that directs radiation beams to treat the entire breast, and (in some cases) the nearby lymph node chains. This type of external beam radiation is used for patients who have had a lumpectomy; a similar technique is used for patients who require radiation after a mastectomy, to treat the chest wall and nearby lymph nodes.

Whole breast radiation is safe and painless, with limited side effects, which means you can usually keep up your daily activities. You simply come in for approximately 10 minutes each day, Monday through Friday, for a total of five to seven weeks.

Partial Breast Radiation

Partial breast radiation may be an option if you plan to have a lumpectomy. The benefit to partial breast radiation is that it may reduce your risk of side effects, and also have a shorter treatment time.

If you choose partial breast radiation after your lumpectomy, your surgeon will insert a small device in your breast with a small tube that will extend from the side of your breast. This device is easily removed in our office once your treatment sessions are complete.

During each treatment session, the tube extending from your breast will be attached to a special HDR radiation machine. This machine will put a radioactive “seed” into the device inside your breast for 10 or 15 minutes, then return it to the machine. The treatment is not painful, and you are not radioactive after the treatment.

Partial breast radiation treatments are delivered twice a day, for five days. Typically, there is a four- to six-hour break between the two daily treatments. You are free to leave the office during these breaks, and you should be able to go to work or do whatever you usually do during the day.

Treatment side effects may include a temporary skin reaction, fatigue, a small risk of infection, and a slight change in the size and shape of the breast (due to scar tissue formation).

Your physician and the Patient Advocates at Cancer Care of Western New York can answer any additional questions you may have, and help you determine which treatment is right for you.