



Radiation Therapy Tattoos

Before starting radiation treatments, you'll go through a treatment preparation process called "simulation." During this step, your radiation team will take measurements of your body and mark your skin to guide your treatments. Some of these marks may be permanent and are called tattoos. These tattoos help the therapists align your body precisely for each treatment session, ensuring the radiation targets the exact same area every time.

The tattoos might not always be placed directly where you're receiving treatment. In some cases, they are positioned on the sides of your body or in more stable areas to help ensure your body stays properly aligned or "level", just like it was during the simulation.

What do the tattoos look like?

The tattoos are tiny dots, about the size of a pinpoint or a freckle. They're made with India ink, typically in blue or black.

How are the tattoos done?

The radiation oncologist decides the exact spots for the tattoos based on your treatment plan. A therapist will use a marker or laser to mark those areas on your skin. To create the tattoos, a small drop of ink is placed on the marked spot, and a needle is used to gently prick the skin. This may feel like a quick pinch or a mosquito bite—slightly uncomfortable, but the sensation is brief. The needle only goes into the top few layers of skin, not deep.

How many tattoos will I get?

You'll usually receive between 1 and 4 tattoos, although sometimes more may be required. In certain situations, a second set of tattoos might be necessary, especially if multiple areas of the body are being treated or if there's a change in your treatment plan.

Why are the tattoos permanent?

These tattoos are essential to ensure your treatment is delivered accurately. Since they are permanent, you won't need to worry about them fading or washing off during bathing or showering. Additionally, if you require more radiation therapy in the future, the tattoos serve as a reference to your previous treatments.

Can I get treatment without getting tattoos?

In some cases, tattoos may not be necessary. Be sure to discuss your options with your healthcare provider to understand what alternatives are available.