

Radiation Oncologist

A cancer doctor who treats with radiation beams instead of a scalpel. Thirteen years of training for one of the highest paid jobs in medicine.

TYPICAL PAY

\$420,860

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$89k to \$594k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

13 to 14 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Hospital cancer centers,
outpatient radiation clinics, acad...**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and math. Physics matters more here than in almost any other medical specialty.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major with the pre-medical science courses finished, plus the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test).
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
Classroom science then hospital rotations. You graduate as a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO).
- 4 Preliminary clinical year** 1 year
A general year in internal medicine or surgery before the specialty training starts.
- 5 Radiation oncology residency** 4 years
Cancer biology, radiation physics, treatment planning and clinic. You learn to aim a beam at a tumor while sparing what is next to it.
- 6 Board certification** During and after residency
Written qualifying exams during residency, then an oral certifying exam from the American Board of Radiology.

Pros and cons

- + Among the best paid specialties in medicine
- + Hours are predictable by doctor standards, with little night work
- + You follow patients through a whole course and see the result
- Thirteen years and around \$200,000 of debt first
- Few training spots and jobs tied to where the machines are
- Some patients you treat will die anyway, and you tell them so

Good to know

Roughly half of cancer patients get radiation

It is used to cure tumors, to shrink them before surgery, and to relieve pain when cure is not possible. That makes this a small specialty involved in a very large share of cancer care.

The dose is built up over weeks

A standard course is a short treatment every weekday for several weeks. Splitting the dose lets healthy tissue repair between sessions while the tumor falls behind.

Optional boosts

Brachytherapy. Stereotactic treatment. Pediatric radiation oncology. Proton therapy.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Radiologists (29-1224.00)
American Board of Radiology: getting certified in radiation oncology
Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education
United States Medical Licensing Examination

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/radiation-oncologist>



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