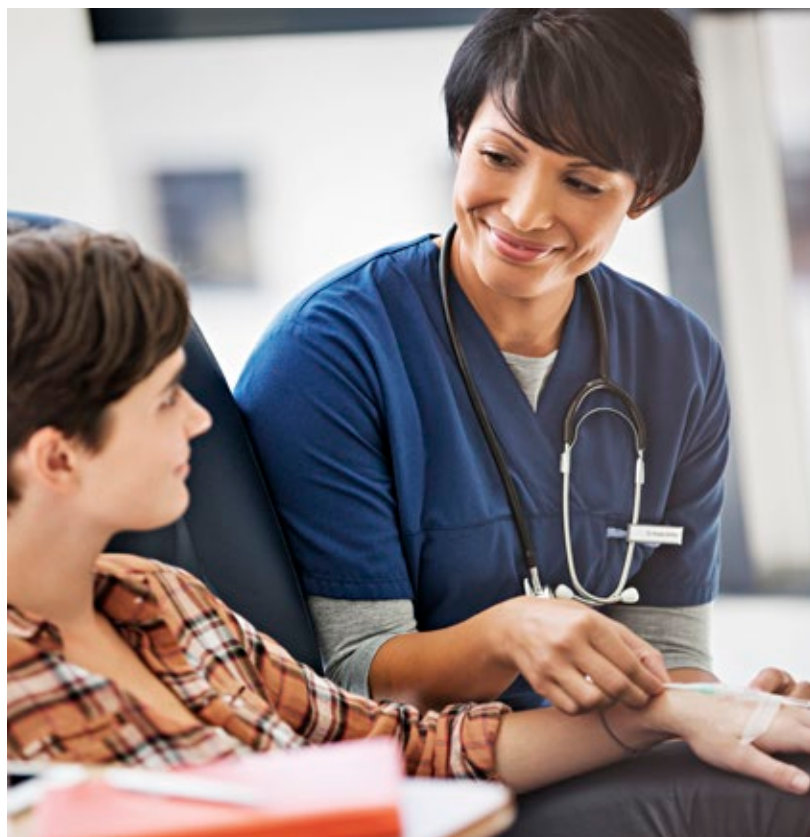




Need a specialist?
Use **WebMD's Physician Finder**.
Go to webmd.com/findadoctor.

REVIEWED BY *Arefa Cassoobhoy, MD, MPH*
WebMD Senior Medical Director



WHO'S WHO

Oncologist

What does this cancer specialist do?

YOU PROBABLY KNOW THAT AN ONCOLOGIST IS A CANCER DOCTOR, BUT what makes someone qualified to treat such a complex and serious disease? Some facts may surprise you.

There's more than one type

If you've been diagnosed with cancer, you might interact with a medical oncologist, surgical oncologist, and radiation oncologist. These experts are all oncologists because they're trained to treat cancer, but they have very different roles.

A medical oncologist will likely be your primary point person. This doctor diagnoses cancer, gives medications (including those for chemotherapy) to treat it, and coordinates care with other cancer specialists as needed.

A surgical oncologist, as you might have guessed, is the person who performs surgery in cancer patients. That includes major surgeries, such as mastectomies for breast cancer, as well as less invasive surgical procedures like biopsies.

A radiation oncologist is a doctor who specializes in treating cancer with radiation therapy.

The job is extremely specialized

All oncologists treat cancer, but they don't all treat the same kind of cancer. A patient who has breast cancer, for example, may go to a different medical oncologist from someone who has prostate or lung cancer.

A lot of training is involved

Medical school is only the beginning. A doctor who wants to be a medical oncologist must complete a three-year internal medicine residency (hands-on training at a hospital or clinic), followed by a medical oncology fellowship (another two to three years).

To become a surgical oncologist, a doctor must complete a five-year general surgery residency, then a surgical oncology fellowship (at least two years). Radiation oncologists do a one-year internship after medical school plus a four-year radiation oncology residency; some also do a one- to two-year fellowship.

Most oncologists are also board-certified, which means a doctor has successfully completed advanced levels of training and passed additional exams. He or she must also go through a rigorous re-certification process to remain board-certified.

BY THE NUMBERS

1.7 million
Number of new cancer cases diagnosed in the U.S. each year

15.5 million
Number of cancer survivors living in the U.S.

32%
Percentage of oncologists in the U.S. who are women

51
The average age of oncologists who currently treat patients in the U.S.