

Pelvic Area Radiation Therapy

Caring for yourself during treatment

You'll be receiving radiation therapy treatments to your pelvic area. The goal of radiation therapy is to destroy any cancer cells that remain in this area and stop them from growing back. Radiation therapy can cause side effects because it may damage the healthy cells in the treatment area.

The most common short-term side effects of receiving radiation therapy to your pelvic area are:

- Skin irritation (especially in the rectum and skin folds of the groin)
- Bowel changes
- Changes in urination
- Fatigue

Usually, most side effects end about 2 months after radiation therapy is over. With the help of your care team, you can manage these short-term side effects with the following recommendations.

Skin irritation

One of the most common side effects of radiation therapy is skin changes. Your skin may become red, itchy, dry, peeling or swollen about 2 to 4 weeks after your 1st radiation treatment.

What to do

- **Clothing.** Wear loose-fitting, cotton clothes that allow your skin to breathe.
 - » Don't wear anything too tight, such as tight jeans.
 - » If you've been wearing jockey briefs, wear cotton boxer shorts instead.
 - » If you've been wearing girdles or shapers, stop. Wear only cotton underwear.

- **Bathing.** Soak in a bathtub with lukewarm water 2 to 4 times a day for 10 to 15 minutes each time.
 - » Don't use soap, oils or bubble baths.
 - » Don't rub your skin with a towel or washcloth.
 - » Pat your skin dry after you bathe.
 - » If you're unable to get into a bathtub, talk with your nurse.
- **Skin care products.** Talk with your care team before using any soaps, lotions, oils, powders, ointments, medications or bandages in your treatment area. If your skin becomes irritated, dry or itchy, you may use any of these over-the-counter products:
 - » Unscented mild moisturizers, such as aloe vera gel, Aquaphor, Vanicream, Eucerin, Lubriderm, CeraVe, Cetaphil and Gold Bond
 - » Over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream for itching

Bowel changes

You may experience frequent bowel movements, loose stools, gas, diarrhea or abdominal cramping 2 to 4 weeks after beginning radiation treatment. You also may have rectal soreness.

What to do

- Talk with your care team about medicines that are safe to treat diarrhea.
- Drink at least 8 glasses (8 ounces each) of clear fluids every day. Try water, clear soup, sport drinks, ginger ale or ginger tea.
 - » Don't drink alcohol and limit caffeine.
 - » Drink milk as you're able to tolerate.
 - » Let carbonated beverages go "flat" before drinking them.
- Eat 5 to 6 small meals of bland food. Try foods low in fiber, such as bananas, white rice, canned fruit and applesauce, white toast, cooked cereal, eggs, noodles or pasta, yogurt (without fruit) and crackers. Don't eat spicy, fatty, greasy or fried foods, or whole grains, raw fruits and vegetables.
- Take care of your skin by using a soft cloth, baby wipe or spray bottle to clean yourself after diarrhea. You may also take sitz baths. Sitz baths are warm-water baths that you sit in. The water covers your hips and buttocks.

Urination changes

A feeling of urgency (need to urinate right away) is a common side effect among people receiving radiation therapy to the pelvic area.

Talk with your care team at your next visit if you:

- Have a burning sensation when you urinate.
- Can't urinate.
- Notice changes in your bladder control.
- Urinate more often, including during the night.

Fatigue

Many people continue to work and do daily activities during radiation therapy. During your treatments, you may experience a mild to moderate loss of energy.

Fatigue is more than simply being tired. Fatigue is a feeling of exhaustion or extreme lack of energy.

What to do

- Go to bed at night and get up in the morning at the same time every day. Sleep for at least 8 hours a night.
- Take shorter naps instead of longer naps. Rest as needed during the day. Avoid sleeping later in the day so you're more likely to sleep through the night.
- Do light physical activity, such as walking, which restores or increases your energy.

Questions?

If you have questions about your radiation therapy or concerns about side effects, call your cancer care team.

