

Radiation Therapy to the Pelvis

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You are scheduled to receive radiation treatments designed specifically for you. The following guidelines will help you take an active part in your treatment.

What to Expect During Your Treatment

Skin changes

Temporary skin changes may occur gradually. Usually these changes include redness, dryness, scaling, and itching of the treated area.

- Skin changes usually occur one to two weeks after your treatment begins and may last one to two weeks after your last treatment.
- You may shower or bathe throughout your radiation therapy. Your nurse will recommend a mild soap for you to use.
- Moisturizers such as _____ may be applied to the following areas:
 - It is important to keep skin folds clean and dry.
 - Apply moisturizers to the abdominal area if needed. **Do not** use moisturizers within two hours **before** your radiation treatment.
 - Avoid wearing tight clothing, pantyhose, or girdles. Loose-fitting cotton underwear is recommended.
 - Keep the anal area (skin around the opening of the rectum) clean and dry. Wash gently after each bowel movement with moisturized, unscented, alcohol-free wipes. If irritated, apply _____
 - Avoid using saunas and hot tubs while you are undergoing treatment with radiation therapy.
 - Baby wipes instead of paper toilet tissue is helpful. Sitz Baths or sitting in a tub of warm water can be soothing.
 - Using a hair dryer on low or cool after bathing or using a Sitz Bath can help to gently dry the area.

Sexual concerns

Sexual concerns may occur while you are receiving treatment.

- For women, your nurse or doctor will give you information about sexual activity during this time. If you had surgery, the length of the vagina may have been shortened and the level of vaginal wetness can change. A water-based lubricant (such as K-Y Jelly®) may increase comfort during sexual activity. **Do not** use petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline®).
- For men, radiation treatment to the pelvis for prostate cancer may result in impotence for months or years after treatment. Talk with your nurse and doctor about the possibility of impotence and what you can do if you experience this side effect.

Urinary changes

Difficulty urinating (passing your water) or urinating more often than usual may occur about four weeks into your treatment.

- Drink at least six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily throughout your radiation therapy, unless your doctor has restricted the amount of fluids you can drink because of another medical condition. This should be continued for two or three weeks after your last treatment. Avoid drinking liquids in the evening and before bedtime, so you can rest comfortably at night. Alcoholic beverages and beverages containing caffeine may irritate your bladder and increase the sensation (the need) to pass your water more often.
- Cranberry juice and vitamin C supplements at recommended dose may help relieve bladder irritation. Ask your doctor or nurse for specific recommendations.

Bowel changes

Loose, frequent bowel movements may occur two to three weeks into treatment.

- Your nurse will give you a low-residue diet to follow throughout your radiation treatment to control side effects of treatment if this occurs.
- Eat small frequent meals instead of three large meals a day.
- Avoid very hot or cold food and drinks.
- Registered dietitians are available to discuss your diet with you and your family.
- Over the counter anti-diarrheal medication can be used.
- Ask your doctor or nurse to suggest medications or products you may use to help relieve the discomfort of your irritated rectal area. Your doctor may prescribe medications that decrease the frequency of bowel movements.

What to Ask Your Nurse or Doctor

Ask your nurse and doctor any questions you may have about the following:

- Redness and/or tenderness of the skin
- Loose bowel movements
- Discomfort when urinating (emptying your bladder)
- Frequent urination
- Fatigue
- Difficulty with intercourse
- Any new or unusual symptoms
- Availability of support groups

Things to Report Immediately

Call **immediately** if you have any of the following symptoms:

- More than five loose, watery stools in a 24-hour period
- Unusual bleeding
- Temperature of 100.5°F (38°C) or above
- Chills

In an Emergency Call:
