

Radiation to the Abdomen

What you need to know

As it works to rid your body of cancer cells, radiation therapy can cause side effects in the treated area. Most side effects begin after two or three weeks of treatment. Report any side effects you experience to your radiation oncology team. This card provides information about how to minimize and treat side effects.

Skin reaction

You could experience skin dryness or irritation of your skin on the abdomen or in the folds of your skin.

Initially, this reaction may appear as pinkness or tanning. It may progress to red, hot or open moist peeling areas of skin. Your skin may feel dry or itchy, or you may notice an itchy, bumpy rash in the treated area.

Here's how to care for your skin in the treated area:

- Use non-deodorant, non-perfumed soap such as unscented *Dove* or *Basis*. Gently cleanse (don't scrub) the treatment area and pat dry. Don't rub the markings on your skin.
- Don't apply unapproved lotions, creams or oils to the skin in the treated area. If your skin is uncomfortable, please let us know and we will give you something to apply to your skin.
- Don't apply heat or ice packs/pads directly to skin in the treated area.
- You'll be sensitive to sunburn in the treated area so wear clothing that covers it and don't expose that skin to sun. After you've completed your treatment and your skin has healed, you may expose it to sun, but use a sunblock of SPF 30 or higher and reapply it frequently. Your skin may be sensitive to sunburn in the treated area for up to a year after radiation is completed.

Nausea/Vomiting

Radiation to the abdomen may cause nausea or vomiting. This may occur as soon as the first or second treatment. Please follow these instructions:

- Eat cool, light foods such as broth, popsicles, sherbet, ice cream or pudding.
- Eat small amounts frequently; avoid spicy, fatty or strong-smelling foods.
- Make sure you are drinking six to eight, eight-ounce glasses of liquids daily.
- Report nausea or vomiting to the radiation oncology staff.
- Take anti-nausea medication approximately one hour before your treatment.

Diarrhea/Frequent Stools

Radiation to the abdomen may cause irritation of the bowel, which may lead to loose bowel movements, cramping or an increase in gas. You may have formed bowel movements, but experience urgency or frequent bowel movements. If this occurs, please follow these instructions:

- Avoid the following foods: salads, raw vegetables, fresh fruits (except bananas), whole grains, bran, brown rice, nuts, seeds, skins, popcorn, spicy foods and alcohol. Ask your radiation nurse for an *Eating Hints* booklet or low-fiber diet instructions.
- For loose stool, you may take one or two capsules of *Imodium* (over the counter diarrhea medication) as needed, for a maximum of eight tablets in a 24-hour period.
- Notify your radiation nurse or physician if *Imodium* isn't helping your diarrhea.
- Drink six to eight, eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated liquid a day to prevent dehydration.

Fatigue

During the last few weeks of your treatment, you may experience some generalized fatigue. You may need additional rest. Try these strategies to fight fatigue:

- Balance activity with rest. If you feel tired, take a brief nap, if possible, or put your feet up briefly, then resume your activity.
- Drink six to eight, eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated beverages each day.
- Stay active. Walking is a non-stressful activity that may help fatigue.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is important. Try to eat three balanced meals each day. Don't try to diet or lose weight during treatment and don't skip meals. If you lose weight, a nurse will discuss your diet with you. If you need guidance about what makes a balanced meal, please discuss this with a nurse.

You may take a multivitamin but do not take vitamin E or vitamin C tablets.

Important Note: While you're undergoing radiation therapy, pregnancy is not advised. If you're not sure if you're pregnant or think you might be, please report this to your radiation therapy physician immediately.

Questions? Ask Us.

Remember: Report any side effects to the Radiation Oncology staff.

If you have concerns or questions, please ask them during your treatment appointment. If you need to speak with someone urgently, please call:

- Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Radiation Oncology Center at 314-251-6844
- After hours, to reach a physician call 314-663-3011



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