

Radiation to the Pelvis

What you need to know

As it works to rid your body of cancer cells, radiation therapy can cause side effects to the skin 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 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.

Diarrhea/Frequent Stools

Radiation to the pelvis may cause irritation of the rectum or colon, 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 a low-fiber diet booklet.
- For loose stool, you may take one or two capsules of Imodium (over the counter diarrhea medication) after each loose stool, 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.

Rectal Bleeding, Rectal Soreness or Perineal Irritation

If you have pre-existing hemorrhoid problems, you may have soreness or bleeding of the rectal area following radiation. It may also cause irritation of the perineal area if you are female. Please follow the instructions if this occurs:

- Report any soreness, itching or bleeding of the rectal area.
- Report any discharge, itching or discomfort of the vaginal area.
- Keep rectal and vaginal areas clean and dry. You may clean this area with unscented baby wipes as needed.
- You may soak in a warm shallow tub bath or use a sitz bath to make you more comfortable.
- Wear white cotton underwear.

Bladder Irritation

Pelvic radiation may cause irritation of the bladder. Signs of bladder irritation include pain, burning, pressure, bleeding or increased frequency of urination.

Report any signs of bladder irritation to the nurse or physician. You may need to be checked for a bladder infection.

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.
- 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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