

*If you have
any questions,
please ask
your physician
or nurse.*

Radiation Therapy to the Abdomen

You and your physician have chosen radiation therapy as part of your cancer treatment. This handout describes:

- What to expect
- How to care for yourself during treatment
- How to reduce side effects
- How to increase your comfort during treatment

Your physician will usually prescribe 25 to 35 radiation treatments. The radiation treatment itself is just like having an X-ray. It is not painful.

Treatment schedule

You will have 1 treatment every day, Monday through Friday. Your therapist will work with you to set up the appointment times. Each appointment lasts 15 to 20 minutes. Please allow an hour for these appointments. This will give you enough time for:

- X-rays
- Meetings with your physician or nurse
- Any unexpected delays

You will have X-rays as prescribed by your physician. This will help ensure you are in the right position on the table. Your care team does not use the X-rays to diagnose problems or check treatment effects.

You will meet with your physician at least once a week on _____.
They will check your vital signs and any side effects during these visits. You will also have the chance to talk about any concerns about your disease and treatment at this time.

Common side effects

Nausea and vomiting

Parts of your stomach and small intestine may be in the radiation treatment area. Many patients have nausea after about 5 to 10 treatments (1 to 2 weeks). Nausea is often worse if you have radiation and chemotherapy at the same time.

Your nausea may or may not cause you to vomit. Some patients have nausea within a few hours after their radiation treatment. Others have nausea when they try to eat.

Let your physician or nurse know if you have any nausea or vomiting. There are different medications your physician can prescribe for you.

Diarrhea

Part of your intestine or bowel may be in the treatment area. As a result, you may have abdominal cramping and diarrhea. This effect may be worse if you are having chemotherapy and radiation at the same time.

If you have diarrhea, tell your physician or nurse. Let them know if you have diarrhea 4 or more times in a 24-hour period. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration. Your physician or nurse may ask you to eat a low fiber diet. Your physician might prescribe a medication for diarrhea, such as Imodium® A-D (loperamide hydrochloride).

Be sure to stay well-hydrated. During your treatment, you should drink at least 8 full glasses (64 ounces) of non-carbonated, non-caffeine fluids, such as water, juice or sports drinks each day. You may drink beverages with caffeine, but only in addition to the recommended guidelines for drinking fluids.

Loss of appetite

You may lose your appetite during your treatment. This can lead to weight loss, weakness and extreme tiredness (fatigue). It may be hard for you to do your usual activities. If you have nausea, let your physician or nurse know. Your physician can prescribe medication that you can take before meals to help relieve your nausea. If cooking odors bother you, eat foods that are lukewarm or room temperature.

If you find that you become full quickly, try eating 5 or 6 small meals instead of 3 larger meals during the day. Try not to drink liquids 30 minutes before you eat. Try not to drink liquids with your meals.

Eat high-protein, high-calorie foods, such as cheese, whole milk, yogurt, eggs, puddings and ice cream. Your physician or nurse may suggest a diet supplement such as Ensure® or Boost® for added extra calories and protein. If you would like more diet information during treatment, your nurse can give you some suggestions.

Skin care

You may notice skin changes in the treated area. . Your skin may become red or tan. It may dry and peel.

To ease discomfort and protect your skin from more irritation, follow these guidelines:

- Clean the area with unscented bath soap for sensitive skin. Some suggested soaps are Basis® for Sensitive Skin, Dove® for Sensitive Skin or Neutrogena® Unscented. Avoid soaps that are heavily scented or antibacterial.
- Use lukewarm water. Hot water can irritate the skin more.
- Use a soft cloth or your hand to gently clean the area.
- Pat your skin dry. Do not rub.
- Do not use heating pads or ice packs on the treated area. Extreme temperatures can cause more damage.
- Choose clothing made of cotton or other soft knit fabrics.

Apply a moisturizing cream such as Miaderm® or Aquaphor® 3 to 4 times per day to the treated skin. **Do not apply anything within 2 hours of your treatment. It will make your skin more sensitive to the effects of radiation.**

If you are concerned about changes in your skin, please talk with your physician or nurse.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a common side effect of radiation treatment. Daily trips for treatment combined with the effects of radiation may make you more tired. Patients most often feel lower energy after about 10 treatments.

Staying active and keeping a regular sleep schedule can help improve your energy levels. Try not to over-exert yourself. If you become tired, plan for rest periods during your day.