

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, talk to your doctor or nurse.

Radiation Therapy for Prostate Cancer

You and your doctor have chosen radiation therapy as part of your treatment for prostate cancer. This booklet describes radiation therapy:

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

On average, 37 to 42 radiation treatments are prescribed. The radiation treatment itself is just like having an X-ray. It is not painful; you will not feel anything.

Treatment Schedule

The treatments are given daily Monday through Friday (no weekends or holidays). Your therapist will work with you to set up daily appointment times, each lasting 15 to 20 minutes. While the actual treatments take only a few minutes, it is best to allow an hour for:

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

X-rays are done as prescribed by your doctor to ensure the precision of your position on the table. The X-rays are not used to diagnose problems and do not assess treatment effects.

You will meet with your doctor at least once a week on _____.
Your vital signs and side effects are checked during these visits. Any concerns about your treatment can be discussed at this time.

Common Side Effects

Changes in Urination

Radiation may cause irritation and swelling of your prostate. Your prostate is close to your urethra (the tube that connects your bladder to the outside of your body). When the prostate swells, it can put pressure on the urethra. This may cause you to have the following:

- Feeling of urgency and the need to pass urine more often
- Weak urine stream

- Feeling the need to push or strain to begin passing urine
- Feeling of not emptying your bladder completely

Please tell your doctor or nurse if you notice:

- Blood in your urine
- Pain when passing urine
- Inability to pass urine

Burning with Urination

Radiation can irritate your bladder and urethra. This can cause a burning feeling when you pass urine. If you feel burning when you pass urine, please let your doctor or nurse know. Your doctor may order a urine sample to check for an infection. The doctor can prescribe medications to decrease the burning feeling. Drinking more fluids may also offer some relief.

Please go to the emergency department if you are unable to pass urine.

Diarrhea

Part of your large bowel or colon may be in the treatment area. This part of your body is sensitive to the radiation. As a result, abdominal cramping and diarrhea can occur.

Please drink 3 to 4 full glasses (24 to 32 ounces) of water 30 minutes before each treatment to fill your bladder. When your bladder is full, it pushes up on your bowel and helps move it out of the treatment site. This will help decrease abdominal cramping and diarrhea.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you have diarrhea. Let them know if you have diarrhea 4 or more times in a 24-hour period as this can lead to dehydration. Your doctor or nurse may suggest a low-fiber diet. Your doctor may recommend **Imodium® A-D (loperamide hydrochloride)**:

- Take 2 tablets with the first loose stool.
- Then take 1 tablet after each subsequent loose stool.
- It is important that you not take more than 8 tablets a day.

Be sure to stay well hydrated. During your treatment, you should drink 8 full glasses (64 ounces) of non-carbonated, non-caffeine fluids such as water, juice or sports drinks daily.

Diarrhea combined with the radiation can cause the skin around your anus to become irritated. We suggest that you use baby wipes or soft washcloths to clean yourself after having a bowel movement. It is safe to use any unscented lotion made for sensitive skin, such as Remedy™ Skin Repair cream or Aquaphor® healing ointment.

Do not put these creams on your skin less than 2 hours prior to your treatment, as it will make your skin more sensitive to the effects of radiation.

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 decreased energy levels after about 10 treatments.

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

Preparing for Treatment

Your radiation treatment targets the cancer in your prostate. It is important to protect the healthy tissue in this area of your body. Too much stool and gas can cause the lower bowel (rectum) to expand and be exposed to radiation. By having a full bladder and an empty bowel, you can lessen the treatment effects on the healthy tissues in your bowel.

Full Bladder

We ask that you have a full bladder for your daily radiation treatment. If there are some days when you are unable to have a full bladder for treatment- this is OK. During the first few days of treatment, you will learn how much fluid your bladder needs to be full. You will also learn how much you can tolerate until after your treatment is completed. The following guidelines will help you prepare.

1. Empty your bladder 1 to 2 hours before treatment.
2. Begin to drink water or other fluids at this time. There is a water machine in the department.
3. If your treatment is delayed, you may either empty your bladder and restart the process or simply stop drinking more fluids. This depends on the time of the delay.
4. Be aware of the time it takes to complete your treatment. Remember that you will have to wait to empty your bladder until you are assisted off the treatment table.
5. If you have a strong urge to pass urine while you are in the treatment room, let us know right away. For your safety, do not try to get off the treatment table alone. We will help you.

It is OK if you have a few treatments without a full bladder. We understand if you cannot always do this. Urinals are available in case of emergency.

Empty Bowel

Please try to have a bowel movement before each treatment.

Your care team will take an image of your pelvis each day before treatment. If gas and stool are causing your bowel to expand, you will be asked to use the restroom to have a bowel movement and/or expel gas.

To prevent excess gas, it may help to follow these diet guidelines:

- Avoid foods that you know cause gas for you. Common offenders include:
- Nuts (all types)
- Uncooked vegetables such as broccoli, onions, cauliflower, peas, lentils, beans, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, artichokes and asparagus

- Fruit such as raisins, bananas, berries, oranges, apples and fruit juice
- High-fiber foods such as salads, whole wheat bread or pasta, carbonated drinks and dairy
- Eat fewer fatty foods. Fat slows digestion giving food more time to produce gas.
- For now, cut back on high-fiber foods. Fiber aids digestion but also produces gas. After treatment, slowly add fiber back into your diet. Beano[®] added to high-fiber foods may help reduce the gas they cause.
- Eat slowly. This may help you digest better.
- Get moving. It may help to take a short walk after eating.
- Try an over-the-counter remedy such as Gas-X[®].

If these things do not help, your doctor may recommend using a daily laxative such as Dulcolax[®].

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Radiation Oncology