

## Radiation Therapy to the Abdomen

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

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 and increase your comfort during treatment

Most often, 25 to 35 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. 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 physician or nurse
- Any unexpected delays

X-rays are done as prescribed by your physician 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 physician at least once a week on \_\_\_\_\_.  
Your vital signs and any side effects are checked during these visits. Any concerns about your treatment can be discussed at this time.

### Common side effects

#### ***Nausea and vomiting***

Parts of your stomach and small intestine may be included in the radiation treatment area. Many patients develop nausea after about 5 to 10 treatments (1 to 2 weeks). Nausea is often worse if radiation and chemotherapy are given 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 medicines that your physician can prescribe for you.

### ***Diarrhea***

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

Tell your physician 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 physician or nurse may suggest a low fiber diet. Your physician may recommend medicine, such as Imodium® A-D (loperamide hydrochloride).

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

### ***Loss of appetite***

You may have a loss of appetite during your treatment. This can lead to weight loss, weakness and fatigue, which can make it difficult for you to perform your usual activities. If you have nausea, let your physician or nurse know. Your physician can prescribe medicine 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 to avoid drinking liquids 30 minutes before you eat and try not to drink with your meals.

Try to 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 area being treated. Your skin may become red or tan; or it may dry and peel. To ease discomfort and protect your skin from more irritation:

- 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 further irritate the skin.
- Gently clean the area with a soft cloth or your hand.
- 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 skin being treated. But, please **do not apply anything within 2 hours of your treatment, as it may 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 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.