

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

High Dose Rate Vaginal Cuff Brachytherapy

You and your physician have chosen high dose rate (HDR) brachytherapy as part of your treatment for cancer. Before each treatment, the care team will put a small hollow tube (cylinder) into your vagina to give radiation to the vaginal cuff. The vaginal cuff is the top of your vagina that was stitched closed after your hysterectomy.

This handout describes:

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

Treatment schedule

After your planning CT scan, the care team will schedule your first treatment. You will have treatments Monday through Friday, 1 to 2 times per week for 3 to 5 treatments. Your nurse will work with you to set up the appointment times. Please allow 1 hour for these appointments. This will give you enough time for:

- Meetings with your physician or nurse
- Any unexpected delays

Your care team will check your treatment results and side effects during these visits. You will also have the chance to talk about any concerns about your disease and treatment at this time.

First treatment

You may eat or drink normally the day of the procedure. When you arrive, the nurse will escort you to the dressing room. There will be a locker with a key for your use. The nurse will ask you to remove all your clothing from the waist down and change into a hospital gown.

From there you will go to the HDR treatment room. The nurse will help you onto an exam table. They will check your vital signs before the treatment. You will have a sheet to cover yourself. They will put your legs into leg rests that support you under the knees and calves. Then, they will remove the lower half of the table.

What to expect before the treatment

Your physician will do a vaginal exam to check that the vaginal cuff is healed.

The physician will place the cylinder in your vagina. The cylinder will lock into place on the table so it will not move. Your legs will be brought down to lie straight on the table. You will rest on the table in this position during your treatment.

During the treatment

Once the care team checks the placement of the cylinder, the treatment will begin. They will attach one end of a flexible tube to the radiation machine and connect the other end to the cylinder that is in place inside you. Your physician will control the machine from a room outside the treatment room. You will not feel anything during the treatment, but you may hear the sound of the machine. The treatment takes about 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

You may listen to music on our player or you may bring a small listening device of your own.

After the treatment

When the treatment is done, the physician will remove the cylinder. The nurse will tell you when you will have your next treatment.

You may have a small amount of spotting (blood from the vagina) for the rest of the day. Call your physician or the clinic at 312.472.3650 right away if you have large amounts of bleeding.

Follow-up treatments/appointments

For each of the remaining sessions:

- You will still change into a hospital gown and be in the same position on the exam table.
- Appointments will last about 1 hour.

Your physician will usually want to see you for follow-up about 1 month after the final treatment. You may schedule this follow-up exam with the nurse.

Possible side effects

Diarrhea

You may have some diarrhea after the procedure, but it is generally mild. If you have diarrhea, tell your physician or nurse. Be sure to let them know if you have diarrhea 4 or more times in a 24-hour period. This can lead to dehydration. Your physician or nurse may ask you to eat a low fiber diet.

Your physician might prescribe the medication, Imodium® A-D (loperamide hydrochloride). Please follow these instructions:

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

Be sure to stay well hydrated during 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 and carbonation, but only in addition to the recommended guidelines.

Burning with urination

Radiation can irritate your bladder and urethra (tube that carries the urine from the bladder out of the body). This can cause burning when you pass urine. If you feel burning when you pass urine, drink more fluids. Drinking more fluids will dilute your urine. This will make it less irritating to your urethra. If the burning does not go away, your physician may ask you for a urine sample to test for a bladder infection. If you do have an infection, your physician may prescribe antibiotics. If there is no infection, your physician may prescribe some medicine that will decrease the burning feeling.

Fatigue

Fatigue (extreme tiredness) is a common side effect of radiation treatment. But it is not expected to be overwhelming for this type of treatment.

Vaginal discharge

It is common to have some vaginal discharge during vaginal cuff radiation treatments. The discharge may be white or yellow and may be thick or thin. Wear a panty liner, as needed. Tell your physician or nurse if you:

- Have a lot of discharge
- Notice the discharge has an odor

This could be a sign of a vaginal infection. This would require medication.

While you may notice some vaginal spotting, you should not have heavy bleeding. If you have bleeding that is more than a menstrual period, let your physician or nurse know right away.

Vaginal dryness and stenosis

Radiation treatments can cause scar tissue to form in your vagina. This decreases the size and length of your vagina (vaginal stenosis). Scar tissue is less elastic than normal tissue. As a result, you may have discomfort during vaginal exams and intercourse. At your first follow-up visit, your nurse will give you a vaginal dilator. They will teach you how to use it. The dilator will help break up any scar tissue and help decrease stenosis.

After you finish the treatments, you may also notice some vaginal dryness. Using water-based lubricant, such as K-Y® jelly or Astroglide®, can ease discomfort during intercourse.

After pelvic radiation, some women also have a difficult time reaching orgasm. If you have any problems resuming intercourse, talk with your physician or nurse. They can refer you to a trained advanced practice provider who can help you with your sexual concerns.