



How to take care of yourself while receiving radiation therapy to the prostate

Introduction

Radiation therapy is the use of special X-rays to treat cancer. These X-rays kill cancer cells. But they can also temporarily affect healthy cells. This can cause side effects in the area of the body that is treated. Side effects differ for each person. They depend on the area of the body being treated, the type of radiation used, the dose of radiation and your general health.

Most side effects start after the 2nd week of treatment. They may slowly progress during and up to 2 weeks after the end of treatment before starting to get better.

This information is to help you to know what side effects you may have. It will also tell you what to do to help reduce or manage side effects.

Your doctor will follow up with you every week or every other week while you are receiving radiation therapy. Your technologist will give you your treatment every day. You will be seen by a nutritionist at the 2nd or 3rd week of the treatment. Ask any member of the team (doctor, technologist, nutritionist, or nurse) if you have any questions.

What side effects can I expect?

(1) Cystitis

- Radiation cystitis is an inflammation (irritation) of the bladder from the radiation.
- You may have some of the symptoms below:
 - The need to urinate (pee) more often
 - Pain while you urinate
 - Blood in your urine
 - Urgency (feeling like you need to go to the bathroom right away with no time to wait)
 - Feeling like you have to urinate when you don't really need to
 - Leaking or trouble controlling your urine
- Each person can have different side effects. If you have any of these symptoms, tell your technologist. You will meet with a nurse or doctor. They will explain what to do to manage these symptoms.

(2) Changes in bowel movements (stools)

- The radiation therapy may irritate your intestines, which can lead to changes in your bowel movements (stools).
- You may have some of the symptoms below:
 - Diarrhea (liquid stools)
 - Cramps
 - Urgency (feeling like you have to go to the bathroom right away with no time to wait)
 - Feeling like you have to go to the bathroom (stools) when you don't really need to
 - Constipation (trouble passing stools)
- Each person can have different side effects. If you have any of these symptoms, tell your technologist. You will meet with a nurse, nutritionist, or doctor. They will tell you what to do to manage these symptoms.

(3) Fatigue

- Fatigue, or feeling tired, is another common side effect of radiation therapy.
- It is different than normal feelings of tiredness. It may not get better just by resting.
- What can I do if I have fatigue?
 - Try to remain as active as possible. This is the best way to fight fatigue. Walking is a good example of a way to stay active.
 - Stay within your limits. Listen to your body and rest when you feel tired.
 - If you need to nap, limit this to 30 minutes, early in the afternoon. Long naps can make it hard to sleep at night.

Do I need to follow a special diet?

- You do not have to follow a special diet. However, if you have changes in your bowel movements, we may suggest some changes to your diet.
- It is important to not lose weight. Your body needs nutrition for healing.
- It is important to stay well hydrated. Drink plenty of water during the day. This will help manage bowel and bladder side effects.
- Limit drinks with caffeine, like coffee, tea, or soda. These can be dehydrating.

Can the radiation therapy affect my sex life?

- Radiation therapy to the pelvis (the part of the body between hips) can cause changes to your sex life and ability to have children after treatment. Your doctor will have discussed this with you. If you have any questions, let us know.
- During treatment:
 - You can have sex if you want, unless your doctor has told you not to. It is safe for your partner, as radiation therapy does not make you radioactive.
 - Use birth control to avoid pregnancy. Ask your doctor or nurse if you have questions about reliable birth control options.
 - Side effects or feeling stressed may make you less interested or worried about sex. You do not have to have sex if you don't want to. If you have a partner, talk to them about how you feel.

What can I do if I feel overwhelmed?

It is normal to feel many different emotions as you start a new cancer treatment. You can feel worried, angry, sad, numb or okay. These feelings can change over time.

What can I do to help myself?

- Talk with someone you trust.
- Talk with your doctor, technologist, or nurse.
- Take part in Cedars CanSupport virtual support services.
 - For information, call 514-934-1934 ext. 35297 or email cedarscansupport@muhc.mcgill.ca.
- If these feelings make it hard to get through your day or to sleep at night, or if you feel very alone, tell your doctor, technologist or nurse. If needed, you can be referred to a social worker or the Psychosocial Oncology Program for help.

Where can I get more information?

If you want more information, the internet can be a way to get it. However, not all information found on the internet is accurate. You can visit these reliable websites:

procure.ca — Procure; you may also call 1-855-899-2873 toll-free

cancer.ca — Canadian Cancer Society

fqc.qc.ca — Quebec Cancer Foundation

cansupport.ca/cancer-online-information — Cedars CanSupport, information by topic

cancer.net — American Society of Clinical Oncology

cancer.gov — National Cancer Institute

You can also contact the Cedars CanSupport Resource Centre by phone at 514-934-1934 ext. 31666 or by email at cedarscansupport@muhc.mcgill.ca

What should I do if I feel very sick or if there is an emergency?

If you have an urgent issue that is causing you to worry in between hospital visits:

- Weekdays 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM:
 - Call 514-934-1934 ext. 43400 to talk with a nurse
- Evenings from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM and weekends or holidays from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM:
 - Call 514-934-1934
 - Listen to the options and press the number for the operator
 - Ask for the radiation oncology resident on call

If your symptoms are very severe or you are unable to reach someone, go to the emergency department of the nearest hospital. Tell the doctor that you are receiving radiation therapy.

IMPORTANT PLEASE READ:

Information provided is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instructions of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.

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