You will have internal radiation as part of your treatment for cancer in the uterus or vagina. Your cancer care team may call the treatment **brachytherapy**. This factsheet tells about the treatment and how to prepare for it. It also tells about side effects and ways to manage them.

**What is internal radiation?**
Doctors place a source of radiation near the cancer for a short time. The radiation is focused on the cancer cells. This helps protect healthy cells in the rest of your body.

Most patients need more than one treatment session, with 1–3 days between each. The first treatment takes at least 2 hours. Later treatments take less time.

**What to Bring**
- You may want to bring something to read or watch. You will be in bed for 2–3 hours for the first treatment.
- You may have family or friends at your bedside.

**When You Arrive**
The treatment takes place in the Radiation Oncology clinic at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI). It is on the first floor of the HCI Hospital.

The radiation team will talk with you about these things:
- Details of the treatment
- How many treatment sessions you will need
- Possible side effects and how to manage them
- Risks of the treatment

They will ask you to read and sign a consent form.

**Preparing for Treatment**
1. The radiation doctor will put a device into your vagina or uterus near the tumor or area to be treated. There is no radiation in the device until later.
2. The radiation doctor will use a CT scan to make sure the device is in the right place.

After the device is in place, you wait in your bed while the doctors set up the radiation source. This takes 1–2 hours. You may have family or friends at your bedside while you wait.

You must stay in bed until the device is removed after the treatment. The head of the bed may be raised only slightly.

You need to stay as still as possible to keep the device in place. Avoid sudden twisting and turning.

**The Radiation Treatment**
When the radiation doctors are ready, you will go to the treatment room.

1. The radiation team will attach a tube from the machine to the device and leave the room.
2. When the machine is on, you will be the only person in the treatment room. The radiation team stays in contact by intercom and video.
3. The radiation doctor turns on the machine. A small radiation source about the size of a grain of rice goes into the device for 10–20 minutes. You may feel the radiation source moving. This is the only time you are exposed to radiation.
4. After the treatment is done, the radiation source goes back into the machine. The radiation doctors turn the machine off. The radiation team takes the machine’s tube from the device.
5. The radiation team removes the device. You can go home.

For treatments after the first one, the 1–2 hours of waiting is not necessary. The radiation treatment can start as soon as the tube is in place.

**Follow-up Appointments**
Schedule an appointment with your radiation doctor for 4 weeks after the last treatment. Then switch follow-up visits every 3 months between your gynecologist and the radiation doctor.

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Fluid from your vagina. It is normal for a little fluid to come from your vagina for 4–6 weeks after the last treatment. At first, the fluid may be light pink, then light brown or tan, then white. You may douche gently once or twice a day with a quart of plain, lukewarm water. Tell your cancer care team right away if you have heavy flow, bright-red blood, or foul-smelling fluid.

These side effects may go on after your last treatment. If you have concerns, please talk with your cancer care team.

Changes to Your Vagina
Radiation can cause dryness and shrinking of the vagina. This can make it hard for your doctors to do follow-up exams. It is important to gently stretch the vagina by having regular sexual intercourse or using a dilator. You can start having intercourse again as soon as it's comfortable for you. This is usually about 2–3 weeks after the last treatment. A water-based lubricant may be helpful. If you have sexual relations less than two times per week, you should use a dilator. The radiation oncology team will talk with you about this.

When to Call for Help
Call your cancer care team right away if any of these things happen:

- Painful urination for more than 24 hours
- Fever higher than 100.3°F
- Heavy or bright-red bleeding from your vagina
- Foul smell from your vagina

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Radiation Oncology 801-581-2396
After hours, weekends, and holidays 801-587-7000
Ask for the radiation oncologist on call.