

Radiation Therapy to the Pelvis

You are getting radiation to your pelvis, the area around your hips, as part of your cancer treatment. This factsheet is about side effects that could happen. It also tells you ways to manage the side effects.

Possible Side Effects

Bladder irritation. Radiation to the pelvis irritates the bladder. After a few weeks of treatment, you may notice burning when you urinate. You may need to urinate more often than usual. Drinking clear liquids can help. Your cancer care team can prescribe medicine to relieve the burning. Your doctor may take a urine sample to check for an infection.

Radiation may cause swelling around the urethra (the tube that carries urine out of the bladder). You may urinate slower or have a smaller stream of urine. If you notice it is hard to urinate, contact your cancer care team. If you feel the urge to urinate and cannot, please contact your cancer care team right away or go to the nearest emergency room.

Diarrhea. You may have bowel movements that are more frequent or diarrhea, which is loose, watery stools, with possible mucus. This depends on the location of the treated area. Tell your cancer care team if you have diarrhea. They can suggest diet and medicines to help.

Soreness. The anal area may become sore. You could get hemorrhoids. These tips can help:

- Use alcohol-free baby wipes rather than toilet paper to wipe after bowel movements.
- Rinse the anal area with water using a squirt bottle after each movement.
- Treat the anal area if it becomes sore or if you develop hemorrhoids. Over-the-counter hemorrhoid products can help.
- Sitting in a warm bath with running water above the hips may also help.

Nausea. A few patients may feel sick to the stomach because of the radiation treatment. If this happens, tell your cancer care team. They may give you medicine to reduce nausea before your treatments.

Fatigue. Feeling tired, or fatigue, is a common side effect of radiation treatments. Take good care of

yourself while you are in treatment. Keep a balance between exercise and rest. If you feel very tired, you may need extra rest. Many patients find that mild exercise such as walking can improve energy levels. Talk to your cancer care team before you begin exercise.

Sexuality and Fertility. Male patients—Radiation can lower your sex drive or ability to have an erection. This may be short-term or long-term. Ask your cancer care team about medicine to help you keep an erection. If your testicles are in the treatment area, the number of sperm or their ability to be fertile may go down. The recommendation is to wait one year after the end of treatment before any planned pregnancy.

Pregnancy can still occur, so use effective birth control methods during this time. Talk with your cancer care team about sexuality and fertility **before** radiation treatments begin.

Female patients—Your periods may stop during radiation treatment. You may also have other symptoms of menopause. Your ability to have children may change. Talk with your cancer care team about possible changes to your fertility **before** radiation treatments begin.

You may have sex if it does not cause pain or bleeding, unless your cancer care team says not to. If you are not sexually active, you should use a vaginal dilator several times a week after 2-3 weeks after radiation treatment is complete. This keeps the vagina from shrinking and closing. It is important to keep the vagina open so your cancer care team can do pelvic exams to check for any problems. If needed, you will get a dilator at the end of treatment or on your first follow-up visit. See the “Vaginal Dilation after Radiation” factsheet for more instructions.

These factsheets have more information about sexuality and fertility for cancer patients:

- Fertility and Cancer
- Sexual Health during and after Cancer Treatment
- Sexual Health Counseling

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