

Bladder & Bowel Problems during Pelvic Radiotherapy

MISSION STATEMENT

To act as a model institution to alleviate the suffering of patients with cancer through the application of modern methods of curative and palliative therapy irrespective of their ability to pay, the education of health care professionals and the public and perform research into the causes and treatment of cancer.



Revenue from these services is spent on the treatment of poor cancer patients.

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Information for Patients

Bladder problems

Radiation therapy can irritate the bladder and make it inflamed (called cystitis). Symptoms of bladder irritation or inflammation include:

- Bladder spasms
- Burning or pain during urination
- Intense need to urinate (urgency)
- Need to urinate often (frequency)
- Blood in the urine (hematuria)
- Bladder infection
- Urinary incontinence (loss of bladder control)

Symptoms usually occur 3–5 weeks after radiation therapy starts. Most symptoms gradually go away 2–8 weeks after radiation therapy is completed. Some symptoms, such as cystitis or incontinence, may continue or develop after treatment is over.

Drinking plenty of fluids to ensure a regular flow of urine and emptying the bladder frequently may help people manage bladder problems. Report burning, pain and frequent urination to the radiation therapy team. These can also be symptoms of infection. The healthcare team may recommend medicines to help treat some of the symptoms associated with bladder problems.

Bowel problems

When should you call your doctor?

Diarrhoea may just be an inconvenience, or it could be a sign of something more serious. Diarrhoea can also lead to other problems, such as severe dehydration. Some signs and symptoms are more serious than others. Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- Six or more loose bowel movements a day for more than two days
- Blood in your stool or rectal area
- Inability to urinate for 12 hours or more
- Inability to drink liquids for more than a day
- Weight loss due to diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea after several days of constipation
- Swollen abdomen
- Fever of 100.5 F (38 C) or higher

If your diarrhoea doesn't seem severe but starts to interfere with your daily activities, such as if you're concerned about leaving home or going somewhere without a toilet nearby, talk to your doctor. If abdominal cramping is keeping you from your daily activities, discuss this with your doctor, as well.

Also call your doctor if you're taking chemotherapy in pill form and you experience diarrhoea. Your doctor can determine whether it's safe for you to continue taking chemotherapy pills

What can you do?

When you begin experiencing diarrhoea, you can take action by modifying what you eat and drink. For instance, try to:

- **Drink clear liquids.** As soon as your diarrhoea starts, switch to a diet of clear liquids, such as water, apple juice, clear broth and ice pops. Avoid milk products, as lactose intolerance may be part of your diarrhoea. When you have diarrhoea, you may need to drink eight to 12 cups of liquid a day.
- **Eat low-fiber foods.** As your diarrhoea starts to improve, add foods low in fiber to your diet, such as bananas, rice, applesauce and toast.
- **Eat frequent small meals.**
- **Eat foods that are high in potassium.** Potassium is an important mineral that you can lose through diarrhoea. Try eating bananas, potatoes and apricots to boost your potassium levels. If you have kidney problems, consult with your doctor before eating foods that are high in potassium.
- **Avoid foods that can irritate your digestive tract.** These include dairy products, spicy foods, alcohol, foods and beverages that contain caffeine, orange or prune juice, and foods high in fiber and fat.
- **Try probiotics.** Found in yogurt and dietary supplements, probiotics are beneficial bacteria that may help restore normal digestion. Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium are two examples of probiotics. If you've had a bone marrow transplant, check with your doctor before using probiotics. As you start to feel better, you can slowly adjust your diet back to your normal fare.