

DEALING WITH THE SIDE EFFECTS OF RADIATION THERAPY - SINGLE TREATMENT

These are general guidelines only and are not intended to replace talking with your health care providers. Be sure to tell your doctor, nurse, or radiation therapist about any side effects that you notice.

The side effects of radiation treatment vary from patient to patient. Following your treatment you may have no side effects, a few mild ones or some that cause you problems.

Fatigue

You may feel tired for a week or two after your treatment.

How you can manage this side effect:

- Get rest by taking naps during the day.
- Light exercise or physical activity can improve your energy levels.
- You might find it helpful to avoid caffeine or colas in the evening.
- Ask for help with chores and errands from your family and friends.
- Eat meals regularly to help keep your energy level up.

What works for me:

Skin Changes

Your skin in the treatment area may become warm, itchy or pink- as if you have a mild sunburn. This may happen soon after treatment or up to 2 weeks after.

How you can manage these side effects:



- Avoid rubbing, scratching or scrubbing the affected area.
- Dust the area with Johnson's baby powder or cornstarch.
- Wash with warm water and mild soap (e.g. Dove, Ivory, baby soap). Pat your skin dry with a soft towel.



- Wear loose fitting and soft clothing against your treated skin (e.g. cotton).
- Do not put medical tape or bandages on the treated area.



- Do not put anything very hot or cold (e.g. heating pad or ice pack) on treatment area.
- Avoid direct exposure of area to the sun and apply sunscreen with a minimum 15 SPF, if exposing your treated area to sun.

What works for me:

Pain

If you are having a single radiation treatment to help with pain in a specific part of your body you may have a temporary increase in pain for about 24 – 48 hours. If this increase in your pain lasts for more than a few days please contact your radiation oncologist (doctor)

How you can manage this side effect:

- Take your pain medication regularly. Pain can be better controlled when you take your medication as prescribed rather than let the pain get bad and then take your pain pill. You may need more breakthrough medication for a few days.

What works for me:



Nausea and /or Vomiting

If you have had your abdomen (belly area) or lower spine treated you might have nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) or vomit (throw up). If you do experience nausea and/or vomiting this usually only lasts for 24- 48 hours after your treatment.

How you can manage these side effects:

- If you have been given medication for nausea and vomiting take it as instructed. An over the counter medication such as Gravol may be used.
- Eat small meals throughout the day rather than eating fewer, larger meals. Eat slowly.
- Avoid unpleasant smells; fresh air may help.
- Eat what appeals to you but try to avoid fatty, fried and sweet foods.
- Make yourself comfortable after eating but do not lie flat for a few hours after your meal. Wear loose fitting clothing around you waist and stomach.

What works for me: _____

Diarrhea

The lining of the bowel and stomach are very sensitive to radiation and may become inflamed after your treatment. If your treatment was given to your pelvic region or lower spine you may have abdominal bloating or cramps, thin or loose stools, watery diarrhea or a sense of urgency to have a bowel movement. If you do have any of these side effects they should not last for more than a week after your treatment.

How you can manage this side effect:



- Avoid eating fibre-rich foods such as bran, nuts and whole grain cereals or breads.
- Prepare warm food rather than very hot or very cold food.
- Avoid eating spicy foods or foods that are high in fat.
- Eat cooked, peeled or canned fruits and vegetables. Avoid fruits or vegetables with skins or seeds such as berries or grapes. Avoid cabbage, broccoli, corn and peas, as these vegetables cause you to have gas.
- Eat small, frequent meals instead of 3 large meals.
- Anti-diarrhea agents such as Kaopectate may be used.



What works for me:

If you need to talk to your radiation oncologist during the day please call their office number found on the card, which has been given to you.

After 4:30 pm or on weekends dial 613 544 2630. The operator will take your name and telephone number and the radiation doctor on-call will phone you back.

In the case of an emergency please go to your nearest emergency department.

Feelings during Radiation Treatment

Having cancer and going through treatment may be stressful. At some points during your radiation treatment, you may feel anxious, depressed, afraid, frustrated, angry, helpless or alone. It is normal to have these kinds of feelings. If you are fatigued as well, it can make it harder to cope with these feelings.

How you can manage this:

- Light exercise such as walking may help to relieve stress
- The use of relaxation techniques and meditation may help you to feel calmer
- Try to keep a regular sleeping pattern
- Talk about your feelings with someone you trust such as a family member, friend, spiritual advisor or health professional
- Consider joining a cancer support group to meet and talk to other people who are facing similar problems. To find a support group please contact a social worker at the Cancer Centre or your Canadian Cancer Society Office
- Talk to your radiation oncologist, nurse or radiation therapist. They can refer you to a healthcare professional that is trained specifically to help with these types of problems

What works for me:

