

Effects on sex life

You might be advised to avoid having sexual intercourse until after radiation therapy has finished and side effects/ inflammation has settled.

Vaginal care and use of dilators will be explained to you by the nurses and information on self care after radiation therapy will be given to you before you finish your treatment.

Contraception

Although pelvic radiation therapy will bring on menopause, your period may not stop completely until after treatment is over. If you are continuing to have sex during treatment you must use contraception to prevent pregnancy until your period stops completely. There is a risk the radiation will cause damage to a baby conceived during and shortly after radiotherapy.

Skin Reactions

The skin around your pelvis area may experience a skin reaction. The high risk areas are your groin, vagina and around your anus (back passage) as these areas have skin folds. It will not happen straight away but tends to develop gradually throughout treatment and usually starts to settle 2-4 weeks after treatment finishes.

Reactions to your skin can't be prevented however there are things you can do to help yourself feel more comfortable.

Tell your radiation therapist or nurse about your skin care routine. They will let you know if you should make any changes to your routine to help you feel more comfortable.



gradually become pinker or darker



feel dry or tight, and sore



develop a rash and feel itchy



blister or peel

If required our nurses will give you a moisturiser to use during treatment. If you have a preferred one please bring it in to show our nurses.

Note: Vulva treatment: If you're having treatment to your vulva you will notice a more advanced skin reaction. This can be associated with pain and skin breakdown. Please speak to your team so we can help manage these symptoms.

- You can go swimming but only if your skin is not blistered or peeling. Shower the chlorine or salt away straight after. Stop if swimming irritates your skin.
- Non-elasticated underwear might be more comfortable to wear.



washing and bathing

Make sure the water is not too hot; wash the skin gently with products you would normally use and gently pat dry

'DON'Ts' for the treatment area

Please avoid...



rubbing the area



using sticky tape



shaving



using wax, cream or lasers

Hair loss (alopecia) in the treatment area

You may notice alopecia to your pubic hair. Partial alopecia is thinning of the hair and/or patchy hair loss. It should start to grow back again within a few weeks after radiation therapy finishes, but may be thinner. There is potential this could be permanent.

References

SCoR—The Society and College of Radiographers, 2021. <https://www.sor.org/news/scor-updates-radiation-dermatitis-guidelines>

Illustrated panels from the above reference

eviQ— Radiation Oncology, Gynaecological, ID 1471 v.6. Last reviewed 28 November 2019, eviQ Cancer Treatments Online, Cancer Institute NSW, <https://www.eviq.org.au/radiation-oncology/gynaecological/1471-gynaecological-cervix-adjuvant-ebtr#side-effects>

Radiation therapy side effects: Gynaecological Overview

Radiation therapy can cause side effects in your treatment area which can vary from patient to patient. The Radiation Oncologist will have discussed the possible short and long term side effects with you during the consent process.

This brochure explains the short term side effects. These symptoms can begin during a course of radiation therapy and may even peak 1-2 weeks after a treatment course is complete. They should have settled around 6 weeks after treatment.

The oncology nurses will see you on day one or two of your treatment to discuss any concerns or questions you have. Further assessments can be arranged at this time.

Contacts

Regional Blood and Cancer Service
Building 8, Level 4, Auckland City Hospital
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Most Common Side Effects

- Bowel Changes
- Bladder changes
- Fatigue
- Menopausal symptoms (if pre menapausal)
- Sex life changes.

Less Common

- Skin reactions
- hair loss in the treatment area
- Pain and swelling - Some swelling can occur in the treatment area. Take pain relief such as paracetamol as required. Discuss with your treatment team if the pain continues while taking paracetamol.
- Nausea – more commonly associated with chemotherapy however talk to our team for advice.

We're here to help!

Every day a radiation therapist will ask how you are. Please do not hesitate to voice any concerns. If you're experiencing any of these side effects (not limited to this list), we can refer you to our oncology nurses to discuss further.

Bowel changes

Radiation therapy can cause inflammation to the rectal lining resulting in these potential side effects:

- Increased bowel frequency
- Rectal urgency
- Pain / cramping
- Passing wind
- Diarrhoea
- Mucous discharge
- Bleeding (less common).

Please let your treatment team know if you're experiencing these side effects.

What can I do?

Diet change to a low fibre diet. Ask the team for more information on this. Try small frequent meals every few hours.

- Drink plenty of fluids (unless on fluid restrictions)
- Anti-diarrhoea medication (reduce/stop diarrhoea)
- Regular pain medication
- Antispasmodics.

Constipation

This is less common than diarrhoea however if this does occur you must make the treatment team aware and be assessed by the nurses.

Bladder changes

Radiation therapy can cause inflammation of the bladder resulting in these potential side effects:

- Frequency and urgency of urination
- Painful / stinging urination
- Abdominal pain
- Blood in urine
- Leaking urine (incontinence).

Please let your treatment team know if you're experiencing these side effects.

What can I do?

- Drink plenty of fluids to dilute urine and make it less irritating (unless on fluid restrictions)
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine
- Ural™ sachets to alkalisise the urine
- Our nurses may take a urine sample to test for infection.

Fatigue

There are many contributing factors that will cause tiredness.

- The effect of treatment on normal cells
- Stress related to your illness
- Daily travel to treatment
- Balancing life outside your treatment.

Fatigue Suggestions:

- Ensure you're eating a balanced diet (additional supplements are **not** recommended, unless prescribed by your oncology team)
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest and gentle exercise (e.g. walking)
- Practice self care (personal techniques that help you relax)
- Accept help from others.

Menopausal symptoms

Pelvic radiation therapy can stop your ovaries producing oestrogen and progesterone and brings on menopause. Radiation induced menopause may cause more noticeable symptoms than natural menopause:

- Hot flushes and sweats
- Vaginal dryness
- Passing urine more often
- Lower sex drive
- Aches and pains
- Mood swings / poor concentration.

This means your ovaries are no longer producing eggs and you will no longer be able to get pregnant. Please speak to your GP for advice on managing these symptoms.