

Prostate Radiation Side Effects

Side effects may happen because the radiation used to kill cancer can also damage healthy cells in the area around the treatment site. Side effects differ from person to person, ranging from none to severe. Some side effects may not happen until 2 to 3 weeks after you start radiation. Most side effects go away within 2 months after treatment is done.

Common side effects from prostate radiation

- Diarrhea – frequent loose or soft bowel movements
- Weaker stream when peeing
- Rectal irritation
- Peeing often and/or burning when peeing (passing urine)
- Feeling tired (fatigue)
- Sexual changes

Tell your radiation doctor or nurse if you have any side effects, whether mild or severe.

Diarrhea

- Tell your doctor, nurse or therapist if you have frequent loose or soft bowel movements, or belly cramps. Your doctor or nurse may suggest medicine for these problems.
- If you have diarrhea, you may need to change your diet. Eat foods low in fiber and residue. If you need a list of these foods, ask your nurse or doctor.
- Gently clean your bottom (rectal area) after each bowel movement and pat dry. Baby wipes can be used instead of toilet paper. If the area is irritated, sitz baths or sitting in a small amount of warm water may help. You can do this 2 to 3 times a day and/or after each bowel movement.
- Drink at least 6 glasses of fluids a day. 1 glass should be 8 ounces of fluid.



Peeing often

- Avoid or lessen your intake of foods and fluids that may bother your bladder, such as coffee, tea, alcohol and spicy foods. Avoid tobacco products.
- Tell your doctor, nurse or therapist right away if you have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, blood in your pee, or burning or trouble peeing. These could be signs of an infection that needs to be treated with medicine.

Rectal irritation

- Tell your doctor, nurse or therapist if you have rectal soreness, pressure or spasms.
- Sitting in a warm tub bath or sitz bath can soothe the area.
- Ask your doctor or nurse if it is ok to use hemorrhoid creams or ointments.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a common side effect that affects most people. Fatigue can be mild to severe. Some ways to manage fatigue:



Be active. Exercise is the best way to lessen fatigue. Ask your doctor if it's safe for you to exercise. Even 15 or 30 minutes of exercise a day, like walking or gentle stretching, can help give you more energy.



Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep each night. Avoid alcohol and high sugar foods in the evening and caffeine 6 to 8 hours before bed since they may keep you awake. Avoid cell phone and computer use late at night.



Eat and drink well. Try to eat 5 or 6 small meals and snacks rather than 3 large meals. Try to eat high protein foods and avoid foods and drinks with added sugars. Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluids each day, unless your cancer care team tells you otherwise. If you need help with food and drink choices, you can ask to meet with a dietitian.



Let family and friends help. They can help with chores, rides, shopping and meals.

Sexual concerns

You may have pubic hair loss. It may or may not grow back after your treatment. You may have sex although your desire or performance may change. These changes vary greatly from person to person. If you have concerns, please feel free to talk to your doctor or nurse.

Radiation can harm sperm and cause birth defects. If you have sex with someone who can get pregnant, use birth control to prevent pregnancy.

Radiation to the pelvis can lead to a loss of fertility, which means not being able to father a child. There may be options to preserve your fertility. If you think you want to have children after treatment, it's best if you let your radiation doctor or nurse know before radiation.

Finding support

Ask to talk with a social worker if you need help finding support or someone to talk to during or after treatment. For questions about nutrition and diet, ask to talk with our dietitian.

Questions and concerns

Let your team know if you have any questions or concerns during your treatment.

When to call your radiation doctor

- Temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher and/or chills
- Blood in your pee or trouble peeing
- Side effects that do not get better such as diarrhea, rectal irritation, or frequent peeing
- For any other concerns



If you have a medical emergency, call 911.

This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.