

SIDE EFFECTS: UTERINE AND CERVICAL CANCER TREATMENT



SHORT-TERM SIDE EFFECTS

Radiation therapy for uterine and cervical cancer can cause side effects. A side effect is a negative or unwanted reaction to treatment. Most side effects come on slowly, usually starting about 3 weeks into treatment, and last for a few weeks after radiation therapy ends.

Common short-term side effects include:

- **Diarrhea:** Loose, watery stools (poop). Take an anti-diarrhea medication and eat simple foods, such as bananas, applesauce, rice, and toast. Ask your care team for the *Low-Fiber, Low-Residue Eating Plan* handout.
- **Perianal skin irritation:** Itching and/or burning of the skin between the genitals and the rectum. Using petroleum-based ointments and fragrance- and alcohol-free baby wipes after using the bathroom may help relieve this side effect. A sitz bath may also help relieve this side effect. See the instructions to the right.
- **Urinary changes:** Problems with urination (peeing). Ask your care team for the *Managing Urinary Changes* handout.
- **Fatigue:** Extreme tiredness. Fatigue can be managed by getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day (with your doctor's approval), eating vegetables, fruits, lean meats and other proteins, and drinking at least six 8-ounce glasses of water each day.
- **Proctitis:** Inflammation of the rectum that may cause blood in the stool. A sitz bath may help relieve this side effect. See the instructions to the right.
- **Vaginitis:** Irritation of the vagina that may cause discharge, itching, and/or pain. A sitz bath may help relieve this side effect. See the instructions below.

SITZ BATH

A sitz bath is a shallow bath you sit in with warm water covering your hips. This can help ease side effects caused by radiation therapy. Follow these instructions:

- 1 Thoroughly clean and rinse the bathtub before filling with water to reduce germs.
- 2 Fill bathtub with 3 to 4 inches of very warm water (not hot).
- 3 Add ½ cup of Epsom salt to the water (adjust the amount of Epsom salt for a portable tub).
- 4 Lower yourself into the bathtub in a sitting position.
- 5 Sit on a donut pillow to take pressure off the sore area, if needed.
- 6 Soak in the bathtub for 15 to 20 minutes.
- 7 Gently pat the area dry with a clean towel.
- 8 Repeat several times a day, if needed.

LONG-TERM SIDE EFFECTS

Long-term side effects may occur months or years after radiation therapy. These may include:

- **Vaginal dryness:** Changes to the lining of the vagina resulting in vaginal dryness. Mild cases of vaginal dryness can usually be treated by using over-the-counter water-based products. Vaginal estrogen is sometimes recommended and is available in a cream or suppository form. This must be prescribed by your doctor.
Avoid certain lubricants, such as:
 - Petroleum jelly products (such as Vaseline)
 - Mineral, baby, or cooking oils
- **Lymphedema** [lim-fi-DEE-muh]: Blockage of the fluid draining from the leg that may cause the leg to swell. It is more common if pelvic lymph nodes were removed during surgery. A specialized physical therapist can help relieve this side effect.
- **Vaginal stenosis:** Scar tissue that forms in the vagina, becoming less elastic and dry. There may be some shrinkage of the vagina or vaginal opening, which can cause pain during sexual intercourse or pelvic exams. Your doctor may suggest using a vaginal dilator to help prevent or reverse the shrinkage.

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