

# **Managing Side Effects of Prostate Radiation Therapy**

## **In this booklet you will learn about:**

- Common side effects when you receive radiation therapy to your prostate
- Tips on managing these side effects
- Where to get help

Hudson Regional  
Cancer Program  
North Simcoe Muskoka



Royal Victoria  
Regional Health Centre



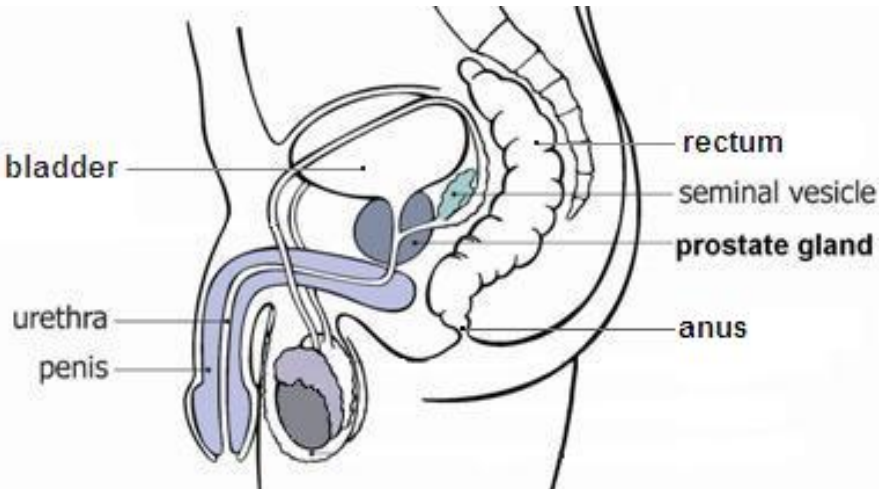
**Ontario  
Health**

## ***Radiation Side Effects***

Side effects caused by radiation therapy to the prostate may vary from person to person. These side effects may be affected by other treatments, such as surgery, chemotherapy, and medications. In this booklet, we have listed some of the more common side effects and helpful tips to manage them. The majority of these side effects may start near the end of the second week of your radiation therapy treatments and may continue for the remainder of your treatment and for about 2-4 weeks after your treatments are complete. You may experience other side effects related to your radiation treatment that are not discussed in this pamphlet. For more information, please speak to a member of your Care Team.

## ***Where Can These Side Effects Occur?***

Below is a diagram to help explain the parts of your body that may experience side effects from your radiation treatment.



## ***Effects on the Bowel***

A small amount of your bowel may be in part of the treatment area and can become irritated by the radiation.

As a result you may have:

- Gas
- Cramps
- More frequent bowel movements
- Urgency (sudden need to empty your bowels)
- Diarrhea and/or
- Rectal bleeding

You may also have difficulty telling whether or not you need to pass gas or stool.

### **Frequent Bowel Movements**

As the lining of your bowel becomes irritated by the radiation treatments, you may notice a change in the number of times you need to empty your bowels daily.

### **Diarrhea, Cramping and Gas**

Tell your Care Team if you are experiencing diarrhea, cramping and/or gas.

As your radiation treatments continue, you may notice an increase in loose and watery stools, as well as cramping and gas.

More on next page...

## **If you have diarrhea, cramping and gas, things you can do:**

- Drink more fluids daily to keep your body hydrated
- Limit drinks with caffeine or alcohol
- Adjust your diet :
  - Cut back on high fibre foods such as whole grains, nuts and seeds
  - Remove skins, seeds and membranes from vegetables and fruits
  - Limit green leafy vegetables, corn, broccoli, beans, peas, legumes, berries and dried fruits
  - Eat small, frequent meals and snacks
  - Avoid deep fried or greasy foods
- Speak with our Dietitian or a member of your Care Team for more tips

## ***Effects on the Perineum***

The perineum is the area between the thighs and around the anus. This area can become irritated by the radiation, causing:

- Skin changes in the treatment area (feeling tender, sensitive and/or itchy)
- Sore/inflamed anus
- Worsening of any pre-existing hemorrhoids
- Tenesmus (feeling that you frequently need to pass stool)

### **Things you can do when washing:**

- Use lukewarm water
- Use a mild, unscented soap for sensitive skin
- Avoid rubbing or scrubbing the area
- Pat dry with a soft towel, or use a hairdryer on the COOL setting, or a fan

Please ask your Care Team about a sitz bath if your skin has started to become irritated.

## **Things to avoid until four weeks after your last radiation treatment:**

- Tight or ill fitting clothes that cause friction on the skin
- Using creams in the affected area (unless advised by your Care Team)
- Hot tubs, saunas and chlorinated pools
- Swimming in lakes

The lining of your bladder may become irritated by the radiation as well.

## ***Effects on the Bladder***

As a result you may have:

- Pain or burning when you urinate
- A feeling that you need to urinate frequently and/or urgently (both during the day and at night)
- A slower urine stream and/or
- Blood in your urine

## **Things you can do for your bladder during treatment:**

- Empty your bladder and then immediately drink 2 cups (500 ml) of water 1 hour before your radiation appointment time.
  - This will fill your bladder, moving it away from the prostate which means a smaller amount of your bladder will be affected by the radiation
- Drink 2 cups of pure cranberry juice each day

More on next page...

**If you are having bladder-related symptoms, things you can do:**

- Increase the amount of fluids you drink during the day (before 7:00 pm)
- Limit the amount of fluids you drink in the evening (after 7:00 pm)
- Avoid spicy foods, caffeine, alcohol and smoking
- Try to empty your bladder often

## ***Hair Loss***

You may lose some or all of your pubic hair starting about 2 – 3 weeks after your first radiation treatment. Your pubic hair may or may not grow back. If it does, you will notice it starting to grow back 2 to 3 months after your last radiation treatment.

## ***Sexual Function***

Radiation treatments may affect sexual function and feelings. You can continue to have sexual intercourse during your radiation treatment, but **you and your partner should take precautions to prevent pregnancy**. If you have any concerns, please discuss them with your Radiation Oncologist or Primary Nurse. The **Sexual Health, Intimacy and Cancer (SHIC) Clinic** is also available to you and/or your partner to address and support your sexual health concerns. You can make an appointment by calling 705-728-9090 x43520.



## ***Fatigue***

Fatigue is a general feeling of tiredness. Fatigue is a common side effect of cancer treatment. Not everyone will have fatigue, but for those who do, it is usually mild to moderate.

Fatigue can be caused by:

- The cancer
- Treatments including radiation, chemotherapy, and medications
- The travel involved in coming for treatments
- The change in your daily schedule
- The amount of sleep that you get
- Less food and/or fluid intake
- Lack of physical activity and exercise
- Pain, depression, or anxiety



Your medications may cause fatigue.

Things you can do for fatigue:

- Light exercise, such as walking
- Take frequent rests during the day
- Try a relaxing activity to reduce stress
- Drink more fluids daily to keep your body hydrated. If you have fluid restrictions, discuss this with your doctor
- Ask family/friends for help with daily activities or chores

The tiredness may start to improve about 2 weeks after treatment is complete, depending on the cause, and may take up to a few months to resolve.



Light exercise such as walking may help with fatigue.

## ***Help is a Phone Call Away***

**If you are having side effects related to your cancer treatment, please contact:**

### **Symptom Support Telephone Service**



**During the day:  
Cancer Centre Symptom Support  
705-728-9090 x43333**



**Evenings, weekends and holidays:  
CareChart 1-877-681-3057**

Please visit [www.rvh.on.ca](http://www.rvh.on.ca) for the latest information and hours of operation.

Hudson Regional  
Cancer Program  
North Simcoe Muskoka



Royal Victoria  
Regional Health Centre

Hudson Regional Cancer Program  
201 Georgian Drive  
Barrie, ON L4M 6M2  
Phone: 705-728-9090 x43333  
[www.rvh.on.ca](http://www.rvh.on.ca)

Last Updated June 2024 (Cancer Program name and logo)  
Content Last Updated Oct 2021