

Your doctors have decided on radiation therapy as part of your treatment plan. You may receive radiation to the pelvis if you have cancer of the bladder, rectum, vagina, vulva, cervix, uterus, or bone metastases. After your consultation appointment with your radiation oncologist, you will have an appointment for a planning simulation/CT.

Simulation

A simulation is used to map your treatment site, ensure delivery of the right dose of radiation to the target area, and ensure that tissues near the target area get as little radiation as possible during treatment.

During your simulation, you'll undergo a CT scan in the radiation department. Your skin will be marked by a radiation therapist. These marks will be used to help position you for your daily treatment. Some of these marks will be made with black marker and should not be rubbed off. When bathing or showering, let the water run over them, but do not scrub the marks. Some of the marks will be permanent tattoos that are about the size of a tiny freckle.

Unless instructed otherwise, you may eat and drink as you normally would on the day of your simulation.

During the simulation, you'll be lying in one position for a long time (appointments are about 45-60 min). If you think you will be uncomfortable lying still, you can take acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or your usual pain medication prior to your appointment.

Make sure to wear comfortable clothes that are easy to take off because you may need to change into a gown. Do not wear jewelry, powders, or lotions.

Side Effects

Some people develop side effects from radiation therapy. Which side effects and how severe depend on a number of factors: the area being treated, the dose of radiation, the number of treatments, and your overall health. Below are some side effects you may experience and what you can do if you experience them.

Urinary Issues

- Discomfort with urination
- Difficulty emptying the bladder completely/feeling of fullness
- Increased urinary frequency
- Sudden urgent need to urinate
- Urinary leakage
- Bladder spasms
- Blood in the urine

What you can do.

- Notify your doctor or nurse if any of these symptoms occur
 - Your doctor may want to order a test on your urine AND/OR
 - May choose to prescribe a medication to help
- Stay well hydrated
 - This will help flush the bladder and dilute the urine
- Urinary pads can be purchased for bladder leakage
- Increased urination at night
 - Limit/avoid alcohol and caffeine
 - Limit fluids 2 hours before you go to bed
 - Empty your bladder before bedtime

Diarrhea

*3 or more watery loose stools per day or mild increase in ostomy output

What you can do.

- Notify your doctor or nurse
- Begin a low fiber/low residue diet
 - Diet information available from your clinic nurse
- Immodium (loperamide) may be started at an initial dose of 4 mg (2 pills) followed by 2 mg (1 pill) every 4 hours or after every unformed stool (not to exceed 8 pills/16 mg a day).
- Drink plenty of fluids to replace fluid loss from diarrhea

Skin Reaction

- Dry, flaky skin
- Darkening or reddening to skin
- Blistering and/or Peeling

What you can do.

- Notify your doctor or nurse
 - Your doctor may prescribe a prescription cream
- Apply aquaphor to irritated skin
- Bathe or Shower daily with warm water and mild unscented soap
 - Pat dry with a towel
 - Do not rub or scrub area
- Do not use alcohol or products with alcohol on the irritated area
- Wear loose-fitting, cotton clothing in treatment area
- If your skin itches, don't scratch it. Apply moisturizer instead.
- Don't shave treatment area
- No extreme temperatures (hot or cold) should be applied to the treatment area (this includes hot tubs, hot baths, water bottles, heating pads, ice packs)

Anal Irritation

What you can do.

- Use flushable wipes instead of toilet paper to decrease friction
- Cleanse anal area with peri bottle/spray bottle with warm water
- Sitz Baths
 - May purchase a "sitz bath" that fits in the toilet bowl at your local drugstore
 - Soak your bottom in lukewarm water for 15 – 20 minutes to help soothe, cleanse, and decrease irritation to anal area

OR

- Fill a clean bathtub with 2"-3" lukewarm water and soak your bottom for 15-20 minutes to help soothe, cleanse, and decrease irritation to anal area
- Barrier Creams/Ointments
 - May apply Desitin with Zinc, A/D Ointment with Zinc, or Aquaphor to the anal area **AFTER** daily radiation therapy to act as a skin protectant and barrier increasing healing and decreasing irritation
- **DO NOT APPLY CREAMS/LOTIONS TO TREATMENT AREA WITHIN 4 HOURS BEFORE RADIATION TREATMENT**

Hair Loss

(in treatment area)

What you can do.

- Hair loss may occur **in the treatment field**. This hair loss may be permanent (depending on the dose of radiation), but usually grows back.

Vaginal Changes

- Vaginal itching/dryness
- Vulvar itching/dryness
- Vaginal discharge
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse

What you can do.

- Notify your doctor of any of these symptoms
- Replens is a water based vaginal moisturizer that can be purchased over-the-counter at your local drugstore to combat internal vaginal itching and dryness
- Aquaphor may be used **externally** for any skin reaction or itching
- Sitz baths (see Anal Irritation section) may be used to soothe external irritation of the labia or vulva
- Panty liners may be used for increased vaginal discharge. **Don't use tampons. Do not douche.**
- Avoid sexual intercourse during treatment and for 1 month after treatment to the pelvis.
 - When you do resume sexual intercourse, make sure to use a water based lubricant (such as Astroglide or KY Jelly)
 - Your doctor may discuss vaginal dilators at the end of your treatment

Fertility and Hormone Changes

(If your hormones are in the treatment field)

- Periods may stop
- Hot flashes
- Insomnia
- Mood Swings

What you can do.

- Notify your doctor if these symptoms occur and become bothersome

Fatigue

What you can do.

- Plan time to rest or take short naps (10 to 15 min) during the day.
- Try to sleep at least 8 hours every night.
- Plan your daily activities. Do activities that are necessary and most important to you first. Do those when you have the most energy.
- Ask family and friends to help.
- Continue to do light exercise (walking, stretching, yoga).

Contact Your Radiation Oncologist or Radiation Nurse if You Have:

- A temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Chills
- Black or bloody bowel movements
- Dizziness
- Flu-like symptoms, such as headache, cough, sore throat, body aches, or a fever
- Vaginal bleeding
- Blood in your urine
- Any new or unusual symptoms

These guidelines are designed to help you feel your best throughout therapy. Talk to your treatment team if you have any questions or concerns.

Evanston Hospital: (847) 570-2590

Glenbrook Hospital: (847) 657-5950

Highland Park Hospital: (847) 480-3908