



Patient information

WHAT TO EXPECT WHILE RECEIVING RADIATION THERAPY FOR PROSTATE CANCER

Oncology

Vitalité Zone : 1B 4 5 6

Facility : Dr. Léon-Richard Oncology Centre

The following document includes information about:

- The main steps in planning radiation treatment;
- Where to find more information about skin care during therapy;
- The most common side effects and how to better manage them;
- The end of treatments.

A team of health professionals, including a radiation oncologist, radiation therapy nurses, and radiation therapists, will provide you and your family with support and information throughout your treatment.

Feel free to ask questions when you come for your treatments each day.

The radiation therapists or nurses will try to answer your questions and will speak to your radiation oncologist if deemed necessary.

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WHAT TO EXPECT WHILE RECEIVING RADIATION THERAPY FOR PROSTATE CANCER

Planning my radiation therapy

Planning is an important step to ensure that you receive the best possible treatment. You will not receive any radiation therapy on the day of your planning appointment. It will be necessary for you to have a comfortably full bladder and an empty rectum.

When you arrive, the staff will:

- Give you an enema to completely evacuate part of your rectum;
- Ask you to drink 500 mL of water in 10 minutes and wait an hour to allow your bladder to become full.

Once the preparation is completed, the staff will use a CT simulator to identify the area of treatment.

- You must not move.
- You can breathe normally during the procedure.

The radiation therapists will also draw marks on your skin. The ink may stain your clothes.

You must keep these marks on your skin and wash the area gently to make sure not to erase them.

Plan on staying for about 2 hours during that appointment.

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Why is it important to have a full bladder and an empty rectum?

The prostate gland lies behind the base of the bladder and in front of the rectum. The prostate moves depending on how full or empty the bladder and rectum are.

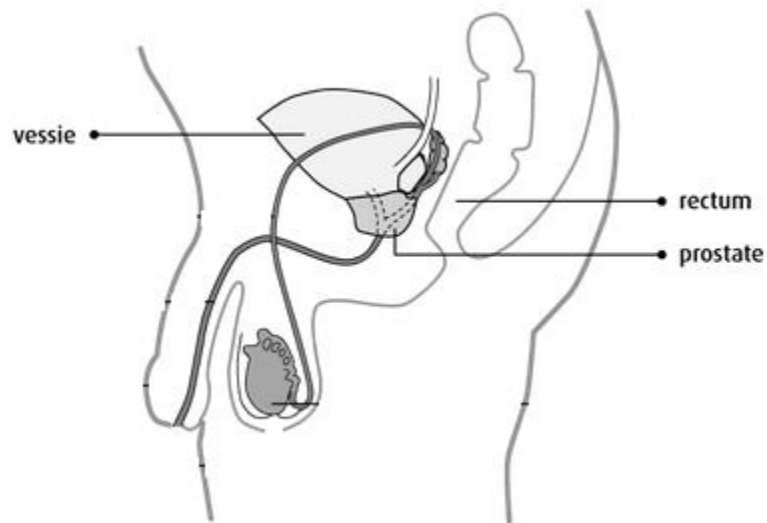


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The purpose of radiation therapy is to aim the radiation treatment right onto the prostate. If you had surgery to remove the prostate gland, the radiation is aimed at the space where your prostate used to be.

To reduce side effects, it is important to try to minimize the radiation dose received by other organs such as the bladder and rectum.

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During radiation therapy

For **ALL** your treatments, it will be necessary for you to have a comfortably full bladder and an empty rectum. Your bladder should be as full as for the planning step (CT simulator).

Preparation – comfortably FULL bladder:

Follow these steps one hour before each treatment:

- First, empty your bladder.
- Right after, drink 500 mL (2 cups*) of water in 10 minutes.
- Do not urinate after drinking. Your bladder will become full.
- You will empty your bladder (urinate) after your treatment.

***1 cup = 250 mL**

To avoid build-up of stools and have an EMPTY rectum:

- If you have regular bowel movements every day, you do not need to do anything different.
- Try to evacuate gas **before** each treatment.
- Do not eat or drink anything that may give you gas.

Please talk to a radiation therapist or radiation therapy nurse if:

- You do not have bowel movements every day;
- You have a lot of gas.

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When will I be informed of the dates for my planning and radiation therapy appointments?

You can expect a phone call a few days after your appointment with your radiation oncologist. You will be informed of the date and time for your planning appointment (CT simulator).

When you will come to that appointment, the staff will give you the date and time of your first radiation therapy appointment.

Where do I go for my planning and radiation therapy appointments?

You will have to register at the reception desk on level 0 of the Oncology Centre for **all** your appointments. Patients are asked to arrive at least 15 minutes before their appointments.

What will happen during radiation therapy?

Once you will be comfortably installed on the treatment table, the radiation therapists will check the measurements from your CT simulation scan. They may take x-rays to ensure that you are in the correct position for treatment. They will then start the radiation treatment.

External radiation therapy is painless. You will not see or feel anything.

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How long is the treatment?

You should plan to be at the Oncology Centre for 30 to 45 minutes every day. Treatments will take about 15 minutes. Most of this time is used to make sure you are in the right position for treatment.

What skin changes can I expect?

- You may have skin changes in the treatment area. This is a normal side effect and it will get better after radiation therapy.
- Your skin may feel irritated after the first 3 weeks of treatment.
- It will begin to heal about 2 to 3 weeks after completing your radiation treatments.

To know how to care for your skin, please see the pamphlet:

SKIN CARE DURING EXTERNAL RADIATION THERAPY

Will I feel more tired during radiation therapy?

- You may feel tired during radiation therapy.
- Fatigue is a common side effect.
- This varies with each person but often begins early in the treatment and can increase gradually during treatment.
- It will get better about 1 to 2 months after radiation therapy is over.
- Continue doing your usual activities if you feel well enough to do so.

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Here is some advice if you are feeling very tired:

- Pace yourself, especially with activities that make you feel tired.
- Ask for help with activities that are hard to manage.
- Pick a relaxing activity or hobby that you are able to do.
- Walk for 30 minutes, 4 to 5 times a week.
- Keep a regular sleep routine and rest as you need to during the day.
- Limit naps to 45 minutes.
- Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- Have healthy, balanced, easy to prepare meals on hand.
- Eat meals at regular times during the day and snacks if you need them.

Will I have cramps and diarrhea?

You may have cramps (stomach ache) or start to have diarrhea (loose stools).

Having cramps and a lot of gas may happen 3 to 4 weeks after treatment starts. A small part of your bowel may be in the treatment area.

You may have mild diarrhea during the last 2 weeks of your treatment. It is rare, but there may also be blood in your stools.

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Here is some advice if you have cramps and diarrhea:

- Avoid foods containing lots of fibre, such as whole-wheat or multigrain bread, raw vegetables, fresh fruit, etc.
- Eat foods that are low in fat.
- Avoid caffeine and spices.
- Eat smaller meals and snack often during the day instead of three larger meals.
- Drink plenty of fluids (8 to 10 glasses a day) to prevent dehydration if you have diarrhea.
- Sitz baths may help alleviate the burning feeling with bowel movements.
- Do not hesitate to ask to see a dietitian.

Will my bladder be affected?

You may have symptoms because of the radiation therapy or a urinary tract infection. You may feel:

- A need to urinate more often, especially during the night;
- Pain or a burning sensation when you urinate;
- Difficulty starting to urinate;

It is rare, but there may be some blood in your urine.

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Here is some advice if you have urinary symptoms:

- Talk to your radiation oncologist, a radiation therapy nurse, or a radiation therapist. The staff will check for a bladder infection. You may be prescribed medicine to help you feel better.
- Drink plenty of fluids during the day.
- Do not drink as much water or fluids 1 or 2 hours before you go to bed. This will help you urinate less often during the night.
- Avoid caffeine (coffee, black tea, cola), alcohol, spices and tobacco.

Will my sex life be affected?

Cancer and cancer treatment can change your ability to enjoy or have sex. Talk to your radiation oncologist or a radiation therapy nurse if you or your partner have any questions.

You can also read the “Sexuality and Cancer” booklet available from the Canadian Cancer Society.

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The side effects described in this document are the most common ones. It is possible that you will have other side effects that are not listed above. Sometimes the tumour and the treatment can cause very similar symptoms.

Please tell your radiation oncologist, a radiation therapy nurse or radiation therapist if you have any symptoms.

End of treatments

If you must have a follow-up appointment with your radiation oncologist, you will be informed of the date and time of your appointment.

Some of your side effects will persist after your final treatment. They could even get worse before they start to get better. This is normal. Continue to follow the instructions received from your health care team until you feel better.

Once you are finished with your treatments, you can call the Oncology Centre at **506-862-4005** if you have any questions or concerns.