

# What to Expect When Getting Radiation Therapy for Bladder Cancer

**For patients who are having radiation therapy**

Read this brochure to learn more about:

- The main steps in planning radiation treatment
- How to manage common side effects
- What happens when you finish treatment
- Where to get more information

For more information on Radiation Therapy, please watch our patient education videos at [www.whattoexpectrt.theprincessmargaret.ca](http://www.whattoexpectrt.theprincessmargaret.ca). These videos offer a step-by-step guide to the radiation therapy treatment process. They also explain how radiation works in the body and how your team works together to deliver the highest quality treatments.



Your radiation oncologist, nurse, radiation therapists and other health care professionals will provide you and your family with care, support and information throughout your treatment.

Please ask any questions you have when you come each day. Your radiation therapists can try to answer your questions or let you know which members of your health care team can help. You may also talk to your doctor or nurse at your weekly review appointment.



Interpretation is available if you speak very little or no English. Please let us know as soon as possible that you need help with interpretation.

**Your doctor will tell you if you need a cystoscopy appointment.  
Read this part only if you are having a cystoscopy appointment.**

## **Your cystoscopy appointment for marker (dye) injection**

This appointment will happen on a different day from your CT scanning appointment.

Depending on where the tumour is, the doctor will inject dye into the bladder with a needle. This will help us to see the tumour for CT planning and radiation treatment.

Similar to the cystoscopy done for diagnosis, this procedure may cause some blood in the urine and symptoms of a urinary tract infection.

These symptoms usually settle by themselves. If they don't, please see your Doctor. You could have a urinary tract infection and need to take antibiotics.

## **Where do I go for this appointment?**

Your cystoscopy appointment will be at the Cystoscopy suite at the Toronto General Hospital.

## **How long is this appointment?**

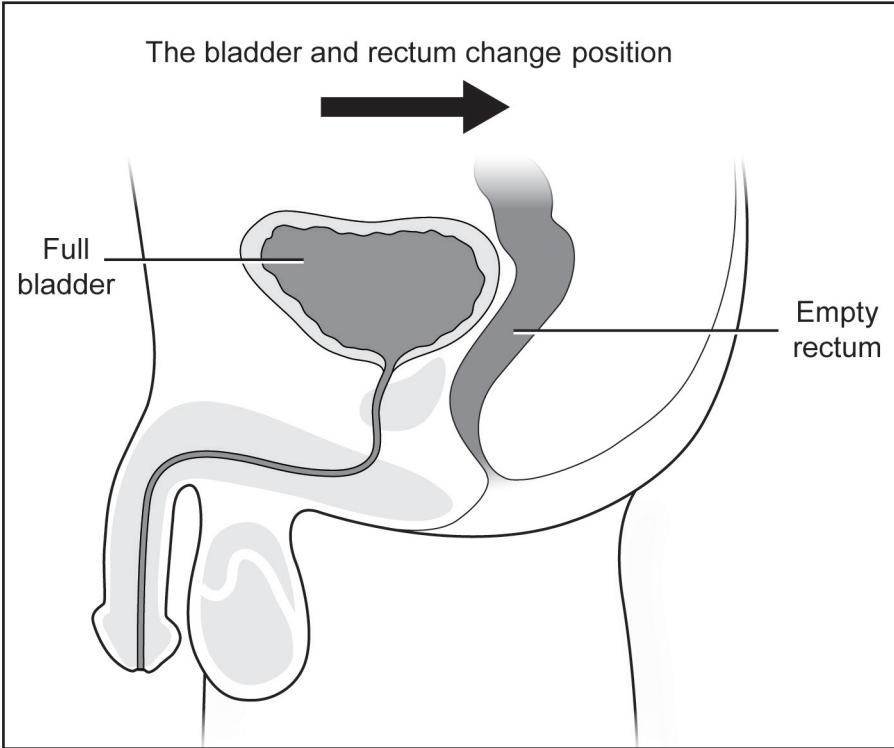
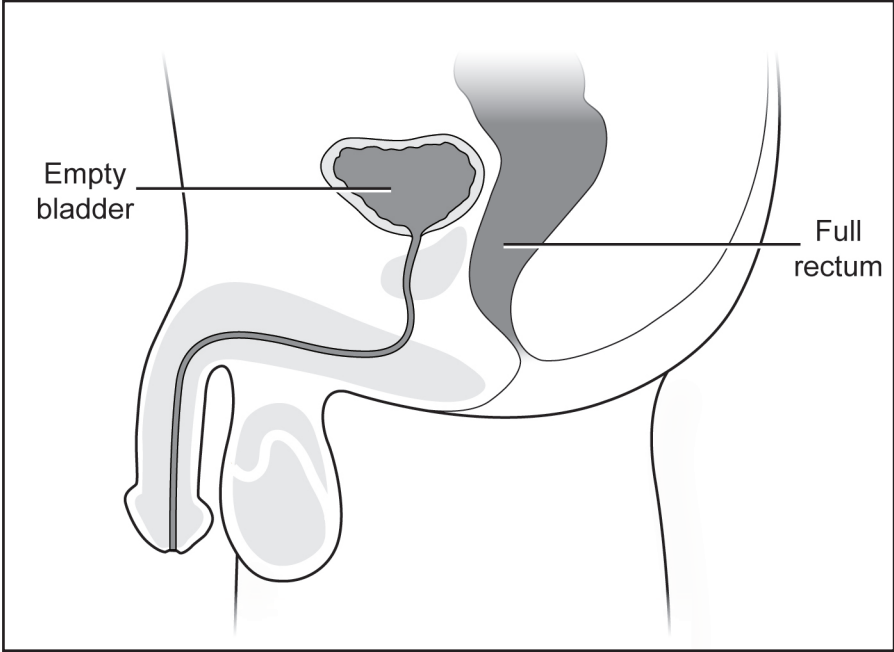
Although the appointment is generally 10 to 15 minutes, plan to be at the hospital for 1 hour.

**The rest of this pamphlet is information for all patients.**

## **Why do I need to prepare my bladder and rectum for radiation planning and treatment?**

Your bladder is located in the pelvis in front of the rectum. Your bladder changes its shape and size based on how full it is. It also changes position inside your pelvis based on how full your rectum is.

See the pictures on page 4 that show how the bladder and rectum change.



During radiation therapy, your health care team needs to aim the radiation treatment right onto the bladder and the lymph nodes around it. They need to make sure that other organs around the bladder, such as the rectum, get very little radiation. This will help to reduce your side effects.

To help your health care team aim the radiation right to your bladder every time and to help make sure your organs are always in the same place for treatment, you need to have a comfortably full bladder and an empty rectum. See instructions on page 6. You need to do this for your CT planning appointment and for ALL your radiation treatment appointments.

**Before your radiation planning appointment, a radiation therapist will review the steps below with you to make sure your bladder is full and your rectum is empty. This is the way you need to prepare for your planning scan and treatment appointments every time.**

**The goal is to make sure your bladder is always in the same place.**

## **How to prepare your bladder and rectum for radiation planning and treatment**

### **To make sure you have a comfortably FULL bladder:**

Follow these steps 1 hour before your appointment:

- First, empty your bladder. This means urinate so your bladder is empty.
- Right after, drink 2 cups (500 millilitres) of water, clear fluid or juice. Finish drinking these 1 hour before your appointment.
- Do not empty your bladder (urinate) after drinking. Your bladder will become full for your appointment.
- When your appointment is finished, you can empty your bladder (urinate).

**Please talk to your radiation therapist, oncology nurse or radiation oncologist if you have trouble keeping your bladder full.**

### **To make sure you have an EMPTY rectum:**

- If you have regular bowel movements every day, you do not need to do anything different.
- Try not to eat or drink anything that may give you gas. Do not skip meals.



**Talk to your radiation oncologist, oncology nurse or radiation therapist if:**

- **You do not have bowel movements every day**
- **You always have a lot of gas**

## Planning your radiation therapy

Please check in at the reception desk on level 1B. We will take your photograph to help us identify you during your treatment.

Please talk to your radiation therapist, oncology nurse or radiation oncologist if you have trouble keeping your bladder full.

**You can expect to be here for about 1 hour for this appointment.**

### **What happens during my CT simulation appointment?**

We will use a CT simulator to decide on the area of treatment. A CT simulator is a CT scanner with special computer software that gives us the detailed x-ray images we need to prepare your treatment.

The radiation therapists may draw marks on your skin. These marks can wash off, so they will also give you a few small permanent tattoos using a fine needle. The radiation therapist will explain this procedure to you first.

The doctors, physicists and therapists will use the information they gather to develop a plan that is right for you.

## Having your radiation therapy treatment

### **When will I know about my first treatment appointment?**

You can expect a phone call at home a few days after your CT simulation appointment. We will give you the date and time of your first appointment.

### **Where do I go for my radiation treatment appointments?**

Your radiation treatment will be at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. Check in at the reception desk on level 2B when you arrive. Level 2B is 2 levels below the main floor.

The staff there will show you how to check in.

**For your radiation therapy treatment appointments, you must have a comfortably full bladder and empty rectum. Your bladder should be as full as it was during your CT planning scan appointment. Please see page 6 for instructions.**

### **Can I schedule my radiation treatment appointments at times that are convenient for me?**

Because we treat so many patients every day we cannot guarantee your exact appointment time. Your radiation therapists will try to help you if there are special circumstances.

### **What happens at the treatment appointment?**

The radiation therapists will check the measurements from your CT simulation scan. They will take a Cone Beam CT scan (sometimes called a "mini CT") to check that you are in the same position every day. Once your position has been checked and any changes have been made, you will have your radiation treatment.



## **How long is the treatment?**

You should plan to be at the hospital for 30 to 60 minutes each day. Your treatments will take about 20 minutes. Most of this time is used to make sure you are in the right position for treatment.

## **Will I see the oncologist during my radiation treatments?**

You will meet with your radiation oncologist and nurse once every week during your treatment. He or she will answer any questions or talk to you about any concerns that you may have. Tell them about any side effects you may be having.

### **Some common side effects to expect from radiation treatment**

#### **What changes to my skin can I expect?**

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

To learn how to care for your skin please see the pamphlet [Taking care of your skin during radiation therapy.](#)

## **Will I get tired while on treatment?**

Fatigue (feeling very tired) is a common side effect of radiation therapy. This varies with each person but often begins early in treatment. It can increase gradually during treatment, and usually gets better over 1 to 2 months after treatment is over. Continue doing your usual activities if you feel well enough to do so.

### **Do these things if you are feeling tired:**

- Pace yourself, especially with activities that make you feel tired
- Ask for help with activities you do every day and that you cannot manage
- Pick a relaxing activity (for example walking) or hobby that you are able to do every day
- Keep a regular sleep routine at night and rest as you need to during the day
- Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids
- Have healthy, easy to prepare food on hand
- Eat meals at regular times through the day and snacks if you need them

## **Will there be changes in my appetite?**

You may not feel very hungry while having treatment. Chemotherapy and pain medications can also make you lose your appetite.

### **Do these things if your appetite changes:**

- Eat small meals and snacks throughout the day, instead of 3 large meals a day
- Eat foods that you enjoy
- Make the food interesting and appealing
- Stock up on foods that are easy to prepare
- Carry a snack with you when you come for treatment, in case you are delayed and feel hungry
- Try not to have too much to drink with meals so that you do not fill up on fluids
- Drink plenty of fluids between meals to stay hydrated
- Light exercise and fresh air may help your appetite

**Please speak with a member of your health care team if you would like an appointment with a dietitian.**

## **Will I have cramps (stomachache) and diarrhea?**

You may have cramps (stomachache) in your bowel or start to have diarrhea (watery stool).

Having cramps and a lot of gas may happen 3 or 4 weeks after treatment starts. This is because a small part of your bowel may be in the treatment area and may receive some radiation.

You may have mild diarrhea during the last 2 weeks of your treatment. It's rare, but there may be blood in your stool.

**Do these things if you have cramps (stomachache) and diarrhea:**

- Eat what you normally do until you feel cramping or diarrhea
- Eat foods that are low in fibre
- Eat foods that are low in fat
- Avoid milk products (lactose)
- Avoid caffeine and spices
- Eat 5 or 6 smaller meals instead of 3 larger meals
- Drink 8 to 10 cups of liquids each day to stop dehydration if you have diarrhea
- Medicines such as Imodium may help to control cramps or diarrhea (For more information please ask your health care team for these pamphlets: "Eating Hints for People with Diarrhea" and "Guidelines for Managing Gas")
- Sitz baths may help if you have a burning feeling with bowel movements
  - Sitz baths may help the skin around the groin area feel better and stop hemorrhoids from getting worse. To learn how to take a sitz bath please see the pamphlet called [Taking care of your skin during radiation therapy](#)

**You can also ask your radiation therapists or oncology nurse to book an appointment for you and your family to see a dietitian. A dietitian can give you advice about what foods to eat.**

## **Will I get frequent and painful urination?**

You may have these symptoms because of the radiation therapy or a bladder infection:

- You need to urinate often, even at night.
- You have pain or a burning feeling when you urinate and find it harder to start to urinate.
- You may see blood in your urine.

### **Do these things to help with frequent and painful urination:**

- Drink plenty of fluids during the day
- Do not drink as much water or fluid starting 1 or 2 hours before you go to bed. This helps you urinate less often during the night.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine such as coffee, tea and cola.

**Talk to your radiation oncologist, oncology nurse or radiation therapist if these symptoms continue. They may check for a bladder infection. There may be some medicine you can take to help you feel better.**

## **Can radiation affect sex?**

Cancer and cancer treatment can change your ability to enjoy or have sex. If you or your partner has any questions or concerns, please talk with your radiation oncologist or oncology nurse.

## Are there other side effects?

If you are having chemotherapy, you may have a lower blood count.

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

**Please tell your radiation therapist, oncology nurse or radiation oncologist if you have any symptoms.**

## What happens when I finish treatment?

Near the end of your treatment, we will give you a booklet titled [Questions to Ask Before you Finish Your Radiation Treatment](#).

At your final weekly review appointment you will be given a follow-up appointment to see the doctor a few weeks or months after your treatment is finished.

After treatment finishes, some of your side effects will carry on and may get worse before they start to get better. This is normal. Continue to follow your health care team's instructions until you feel better.

Call the hospital once you are finished with your treatment, if you have any questions or concerns.

## Need more information?

Please visit the [Patient and Family Library](#) on the main floor, or call them at: 416 946 4501 extension 5383.

You can also visit the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre web site at [www.theprincessmargaret.ca](http://www.theprincessmargaret.ca) for more information and resources about your treatment and also services at the cancer centre.

**Important:** This is not a full list of brands or products. The University Health Network does not recommend one brand over another and is not responsible for any products listed. Please contact each company directly to find out more about their products.

Visit [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca) for more health information. The development of patient education resources is supported by the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation. Contact us to provide feedback or request this brochure in a different format, such as large print or electronic formats: [pfep@uhn.ca](mailto:pfep@uhn.ca)

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