



# Radiation Therapy to the Prostate Area (includes Post-operative Prostate bed area)

PMH

**This pamphlet gives you information about what to expect while receiving radiation therapy to the pelvis area for prostate cancer.**

## **What to Do When Receiving Treatment**

This pamphlet gives you information about what to expect while receiving radiation therapy for prostate cancer. Most patients receive radiation therapy without major side effects. You can help to prevent or reduce or manage these side effects by using the following information. Your Radiation Oncologist, Specialized Oncology Nurse and Radiation Therapist will provide you and your family with care and support throughout the course of your treatment.

Please ask any questions when you come for treatment each day. Your Radiation Therapists will answer your concerns or refer you to other members of the health care team. Alternatively, bring your questions when you see your Radiation Oncologist and Specialized Oncology Nurse at the weekly review.

The following topics include the main preparation steps in Radiation Therapy for Prostate Cancer and how to manage side effects.

## **What are the steps before radiation therapy is given?**

The prostate gland is about the size of a walnut. It lies behind the base of the bladder and in front of the rectum. The goal of radiation is to aim the radiation onto the prostate area and possibly the surrounding lymph nodes but also to ensure organs such as the bowel and bladder will receive as little radiation dose as possible. If you have had surgery to remove the prostate gland, the radiation will be aimed at the prostate bed (the space where your prostate used to be). The prostate area moves naturally within the pelvis depending on how full or empty the bladder and rectum are. Having a comfortably full bladder and empty rectum will help to reduce the dose to these organs as well as reducing internal movements

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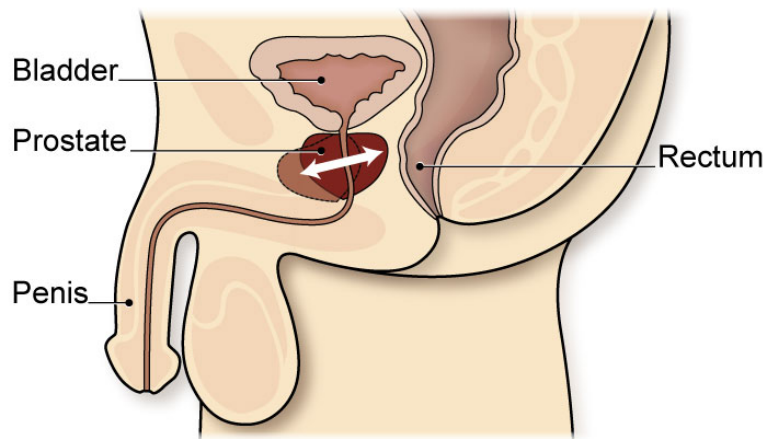
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of the prostate area. During the course of your treatment, special measures will be used to reduce the movement of the prostate.

To ensure precise radiation treatment and to reduce possible side effects, you will need to have an **EMPTY rectum and a comfortably FULL bladder** for your CT Simulation appointment and for ALL your radiation treatment appointments.

Properly preparing your rectum and bladder keeps the prostate or prostate bed at about the same position every day. This lets your health care team target the prostate or prostate bed with more accuracy during your treatment, and can help to lower the amount of radiation that reaches your rectum and bladder.



**If you are not properly prepared,  
your prostate can shift its position from day to day**

You will be given **two or three** appointments before starting your radiation therapy. Each appointment will be explained in the following sections. Please follow these instructions carefully in order to prevent delay or cancellation of your appointments. If you have any questions please call **(416) 946-4501 ext. 6483**.

If you speak very little or no English, we can arrange for interpretation as needed. Please let us know as soon as possible if you need help with interpretation.

## 1. Pre-Treatment Patient Education Appointment

### What is the session about?

- A Radiation Therapist will discuss with you the bowel and bladder preparation required for your CT Scan appointment and the daily radiation treatments.
- There are two education methods: 1) by telephone and 2) meeting face to face. Each method will be scheduled and will take about 20 minutes. Your Oncologist and nurse will discuss which method would be most suitable for you.
  - **Method 1 -- by telephone:** At a pre-arranged time, a Radiation Therapist will call you at home and go over the information with you.
  - **Method 2 -- meeting face to face:** At a pre-arranged time, a Radiation Therapist will meet with you face to face at PMH, Reception Desk, Level 1B and go over the information. Family members are welcome to attend the face to face session.
- If you have any questions about this appointment, please call the Booking office at **(416) 946-4501 ext 6483**.

**If your Radiation Oncologist has determined that you will need to have gold markers inserted into your prostate gland, please read this section.**

## 2. The Transrectal Ultrasound (TRUS) & Gold Marker Appointment

### What is the procedure about?

- Using an ultrasound unit, the Radiologist will place three gold markers the size of a rice grain into your prostate with a needle.
- This procedure will feel very similar to the transrectal ultrasound for your prostate biopsy.
- These gold markers will allow the Radiation Therapists to see and account for movement of the prostate gland during your treatment.

### How long is this appointment?

Approximately 1 hour.

### Where do I go?

4th floor, Room 833 (near the Prostate Centre).

## **What are the preparations?**

### **10 days before your TRUS:**

- Do not take any aspirin or arthritis medicine (e.g., Advil®, Naprosyn®, Motrin®, Daypro®, Feldene®, Ponstan®, Voltaren®, Arthrotec®, Celebrex®, or any Ibuprofen, etc.) for 10 days before your procedure. (Tylenol® is OK.)
- Tell your Oncologist and the Prostate Ultrasound Centre staff if you have heart valve disease or if you are on blood thinning medications (i.e., anti-coagulants such as Coumadin® or Warfarin®). We need to know this before your procedure.
- To confirm your appointment and preparation requirements please call (416) 946-4501 ext. 5180.

### **The night before your TRUS:**

- Take your first dose of antibiotic on the night before your biopsy. Your Oncologist will give you a prescription for these antibiotics.
- You need to clean your rectum for this appointment. There are two ways you can do this.
- You can buy a Rectal Fleet Enema® and use it the night before your TRUS, before you go to bed.
- **OR**
- You can take an Oral Dulcolax® tablet (5mg) with a glass of water before going to bed the night before your TRUS. (Do NOT take the tablet with milk.)

### **On the day of your TRUS:**

- Take the second dose of antibiotics on the morning of your appointment. (You will take the rest of the antibiotics after the TRUS. We will tell you how to take them.)
- Eat a light breakfast (juice and toast, for example) on the morning of your TRUS.

## **3. The Planning CT Scan (CT-Simulation) Appointment**

### **What is the procedure about?**

A CT scan of your pelvis will be done to show the exact location of the prostate (or prostate bed if you have had your prostate removed) and other organs in your body. Information from the scan will be used to plan your radiation treatment.

Using a fine sterile needle, three small permanent tattoos will be placed on the front and the sides of your pelvis. These tattoos will be used to position you daily for your treatment. The Radiation Therapists will explain the tattoo procedure to you.

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

Approximately 45 minutes.

## Where do I go?

Reception Desk, Level 1B (1 below main floor).

## What are the preparations?

For this appointment, you must have an empty rectum and a comfortably full bladder.

### How to prepare an EMPTY rectum

- 3 days before the appointment, start taking 2 tablespoonfuls of Milk of Magnesia everyday
- Ensure you have a bowel movement 1 to 2 hours before your Planning CT scan appointment
- If your appointment is **before 2pm**, take Milk of Magnesia at bedtime (on the night before your appointment)
- If your appointment is **after 2pm**, take Milk of Magnesia at breakfast (on the day of the appointment)
- Avoid food or drink that may give you gas
- Do not skip meals

### How to prepare a comfortably FULL bladder

- 1 hour before your appointment, empty your bladder
- After voiding, drink 250 to 500ml of water (equal to 1 to 2 glasses), so that your bladder is comfortably full
- DO NOT urinate until your appointment is finished
- In case you need to empty your bladder before your appointment, please inform your radiation therapists

If you have problems achieving an empty rectum OR if you have constant problems with gas in your bowels, please talk to the Radiation Therapist on the day of the Pre-Treatment Education Appointment.

## 4. The Radiation Therapy Appointments

### What is the procedure about?

On the first treatment appointment, the Radiation Therapists will confirm and verify the measurements. They will take electronic images to check the location of the prostate and make adjustments if needed. Then they will give your first radiation treatment.

### How long is the treatment?

Approximately 30 minutes for the first day and 15 minutes for the remaining treatment appointments.

### Where do I go?

Reception Desk Level 2B (2 below main floor).

### What are the preparations?

The preparation for your daily treatment is identical to the preparation you followed for your CT Simulation appointment. For all the radiation appointments, you must have an **empty rectum and a comfortably full bladder**. The degree of fullness of your bladder should be the same as your previous CT scan appointment. If you have difficulty maintaining a full bladder, please inform your Radiation Therapist, Oncology nurse or Oncologist.

You will be following the **SAME** preparation instructions as your CT Simulation appointment. (Refer to CT Simulation preparation instructions, see pg. 4). Please follow these instructions for **ALL** your radiation therapy appointments.

### Will I see the Oncologist during my radiation treatments?

During the course of treatment, you will see your Oncologist, usually once every week. This review appointment allows the Oncologist to monitor your progress and address any questions or concerns that you may have.

## 5. Radiation Side Effects

Radiation side effects vary from person to person. These side effects depend on:

- The parts of the body being treated
- The type of radiation used
- The amount of radiation given
- The person's general health

## Common Side Effects

### Will the radiation affect my bladder?

Some patients may experience changes to their bladder habits such as frequency and urgency. Other side effects include a burning or painful sensation and slowing or hesitancy when passing urine.

#### What to do:

- Drink plenty of fluids during the day.
- Reduce fluid intake after dinner in the evening.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine such as coffee and tea. Speak to your Radiation Therapist, Oncology Nurse and Oncologist in your weekly review session. If needed, your Oncologist may prescribe medications to help with these side effects.

### Will the radiation affect my bowel?

For some patients, irritation to the bowel may cause cramps and gas during the third or fourth week of treatment. This is because a small amount of the bowel may be in the treatment area and is irritated by the radiation. A few patients may have mild diarrhea during the last 2 weeks of their treatment.

#### What to do:

- To reduce gas and cramping, a low fibre diet can help. However, continue with your usual diet until you have discussed these symptoms with your Radiation Therapist.
- A referral with the Dietician can also be arranged to discuss your concerns.
- Please ask for:
  1. the information leaflet on “Guidelines for Managing Gas”
  2. the information leaflet on “Eating Hints For People with Diarrhea”
- When you are having more bowel movements than usual or when diarrhea occurs, stop taking Milk of Magnesia.
- To relieve the burning sensation with bowel movements a Sitz bath with or without cortisone suppository or foam will help with the discomfort and irritation of the lower rectum. Ask your Oncology Nurse or Radiation Therapists for the “Sitz Bath” information leaflet and speak to your Oncologist for a prescription.
- Medications, such as Imodium®, can also be taken to relieve diarrhea.

## **Will the radiation make me more tired?**

Some patients may feel more tired especially after 3 to 4 weeks of treatment.

### **What to do:**

- Get all the rest you need
- Eat well balanced meals with lots of fluids
- Stay active but don't over do it
- Continue with enjoyable activities such as short walks, music, reading and other hobbies
- Ask family/friends to help with chores and other commitments/daily activities.

## **Will the radiation affect my appetite?**

Maintaining a regular, well balanced diet with plenty of fluids is recommended unless symptoms occur. Very few patients will lose interest in food while receiving treatment but certain medications can also cause loss of appetite.

### **What to do:**

- Light exercise and fresh air may help your appetite
- Eat smaller meals frequently throughout the day
- Eat foods that you enjoy
- Make the foods interesting and appealing
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Speak to your Radiation Therapist or Oncology Nurse for more information as they can arrange for the Dietician to see you and your family.

## **Will radiation treatments affect my sexuality?**

Cancer and its various treatments may affect your sexual function and feelings. If you and/or your partner have any questions or concerns, please speak to your Nurse or Oncologist.

## **Will the radiation affect my skin?**

Some patients receiving treatment may experience changes in the skin where the treatment is given. A reddening of the skin can occur during the 4th or 5th week of treatment. Most likely places will be the perineal areas (area between the thighs) or the area around the anus. These areas may feel warm, dry and itchy. If you suffer from hemorrhoids, this reaction may cause more discomfort.

## **What to do:**

- Keep the area clean and dry but continue to bathe or shower
- Pat dry with a soft towel, avoid rubbing
- If the reddening is severe in the anal area or if you have hemorrhoids, a Sitz bath will be soothing. Ask your Oncology Nurse or Radiation Therapists for the “Sitz Bath” information leaflet.
- If required, a prescription for a cream or lotion may be obtained from your Oncologist.

## **Are there other side effects?**

In general the above mentioned are the more common side effects. Rarely there may be some blood passed in the urine or stool. Please report any of these symptoms to your Radiation Therapist, Oncology Nurse or Radiation Oncologist. Some of these treatment side effects can be similar to the symptoms you are having from your illness.

## **6. What To Do When the Treatment Is Finished?**

The treatment side effects mentioned are temporary. They will start improving approximately 1 to 2 weeks after your treatment is completed. A final review with your Oncologist will be done on the last week of your treatment. You may want to prepare and bring a list of questions for your review appointment.

A follow-up appointment to see your Oncologist in clinic is usually arranged at this time; approximately 6 to 8 weeks after the completion of treatment. At this time a blood test will be arranged to check your PSA level.

## **7. Other Useful Materials**

- Your Radiation Therapy at The Princess Margaret Hospital (2011).
- Radiation Therapy and You. (2006) Canadian Cancer Society
- “What you need to know about antioxidants and your Radiation Therapy” pamphlet (2010).
- “Guidelines for Managing Gas” pamphlet (2010).
- “Eating Hints For People with Diarrhea” pamphlet (2010).

All the pamphlets listed above are available from the Patient & Family Library (Main Floor), the Prostate Centre (4th floor) and The Patient Family Resource Centres located in the waiting rooms on Levels 1B and 2B.

