

# What to Expect When Getting Radiation Therapy to the Abdomen

## For patients having radiation therapy at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

Read this pamphlet to know 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](http://www.whattoexpectrt.theprincessmargaret.ca) ([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.



## **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
- Drink plenty of fluids between meals to stay hydrated
- Use meal supplements (such as Ensure) if you aren't able to eat enough solid food
- 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 get an upset stomach?**

When you are having treatment to the abdomen, you may have nausea and vomiting. This happens because the stomach and bowels can get irritated.

Please let your radiation oncologist, nurse and radiation therapist know if you have nausea or vomiting. The doctor may give you a prescription for anti-nausea medication.

### **Do these things if you have nausea and vomiting:**

- Eat small meals often throughout the day (nausea is often worse on an empty stomach)
- Try snacks such as dry crackers, melba toast and plain cookies
- Try to avoid foods that are rich, spicy, and greasy or those that have a strong odour, such as bacon, onions, garlic, cooked broccoli and cabbage
- Drink plenty of fluids between meals such as water, watered-down fruit juices and flat ginger ale to avoid dehydration when vomiting happens
- Popsicles and Jello can also be used to replace fluid loss
- Take anti-nausea medication if your doctor prescribes it
- Ask to see a dietitian for help with food choices and nutrition
- If you have diabetes you may need to see a dietitian

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

### **Will the radiation treatments affect my bowel?**

If the bowel is in the treatment area you may have cramps or mild diarrhea. This happens because of irritation to the bowel. Please let your radiation oncologist, nurse and radiation therapist know if this happens.

## **Do these things if you have cramping, stomach ache and mild diarrhea:**

- Keep eating what you would normally eat, unless you have cramping or diarrhea
- Ask your radiation therapist for the “Eating Hints for People with Diarrhea” pamphlet
- Eat foods that are low in fibre
- Eat foods that are low in fat
- Have less caffeine and use fewer spices
- Have less lactose in your diet if this is a problem
- Eat frequent smaller meals instead of 3 larger meals each day
- Drink 8 to 10 cups of liquid a day to prevent dehydration if you have diarrhea
- Medicine such as Imodium or Lomotil may help so check with your doctor or nurse. You may be referred to a dietitian

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

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

Depending on the area of the abdomen being treated, there is a chance that your fertility is affected. If this is the case, your doctor will talk with you about it.

## **Can radiation affect sex?**

Cancer and cancer treatment can affect your sexual function and feelings. If you or your partner have any questions or concerns, please talk with your doctor.

## Finishing your radiation therapy

Near the end of your treatment, we will give you a booklet called [Questions to Ask Before You Finish Your Radiation Treatment](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/What_to_do_When_Finishing_Radiation_Therapy.pdf)

([https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health\\_Information/Health\\_Topics/Documents/What\\_to\\_do\\_When\\_Finishing\\_Radiation\\_Therapy.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/What_to_do_When_Finishing_Radiation_Therapy.pdf) ).

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 ext. 5383. You can also visit the Princess Margaret 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.



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