

# Radiation Side Effects: Abdomen

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## **What side effects can I expect from radiation therapy?**

Side effects from radiation therapy vary from person to person and depend on the part of the body being treated, the dose of radiation given, the size of the treatment area and if you are receiving chemotherapy prior, during or after radiation. Side effects may happen with radiation therapy because the high doses of radiation used to kill cancer cells can also damage healthy cells in the treatment area. Some people have more intense side effects whereas others have none at all. Your team will discuss the specific side effects they anticipate you to experience.

## **What skin changes might I see?**

Skin changes can occur in the area being treated with radiation. Make sure to keep the area being treated clean and dry prior to your radiation treatments. Do not apply any moisturizers, ointments, deodorants, powders, or cosmetics to this area. You may continue to bathe or shower as you have been however we recommend using a mild soap, rinse and pat dry. Skin changes from radiation usually don't occur until a few weeks into your radiation treatments. Please discuss skin care as well as recommended skin care products with your medical team.

## **Will I experience fatigue?**

Fatigue is a very common side effect from radiation therapy and you will probably experience it at some point during your radiation treatments. Typically, patients will feel most fatigued toward the end of radiation. Fatigue includes feelings of tiredness, exhaustion, and/or decreased amount of energy to complete tasks. Make sure you are getting adequate amount of sleep at

night aiming for 8 hours per night. Maintain a balanced, nutritious diet and incorporate some sort of exercise which often helps to decrease fatigue. Pace activities or group them together and take rest periods when needed or an earlier bedtime. Allow others to help you with tasks or errands. Fatigue usually continues well after radiation has completed, approximately 6-8 weeks, and sometimes even longer for some.

### **How will radiation therapy affect my appetite?**

Loss of appetite is a common symptom associated with cancer and cancer treatments. This is when you don't feel like eating at all or eat less than normal. There is no proven data that explains appetite loss associated with cancer/cancer treatments. Some factors include the cancer itself, stress, fatigue, taste changes, difficulty swallowing and nausea and/or vomiting. Try to eat 5-6 small meals per day instead of 3 large meals. Add protein and extra calories to your diet as well as nutritional supplements such as instant breakfast. It may be easier to consume soft, bland foods such as high protein fruit smoothies, pastas, oatmeal, mashed potatoes or bananas. It is often beneficial to meet with a dietician so they can discuss your calorie goals and how to maintain proper nutrition despite the loss of appetite.

### **Will I experience nausea and vomiting?**

Nausea and vomiting can result from radiation treatments to the abdomen, small intestine, colon, or brain. It may be intermittent, persistent or associated with radiation treatments. For example, you may notice nausea a few hours after treatment each day. It can continue after radiation is completed for approximately 2 weeks. You may find it helpful to eat frequent, small meals or snacks. Eat foods that are bland and easily digested (ie bananas, rice, applesauce, toast or crackers, clear broths, yogurt). Drink plenty of liquids especially if you are vomiting (Gatorade®, ginger ale or 7-up®, broth). If

symptoms persist, notify your physician or nurse about medication to relieve nausea and vomiting.

### **How will radiation therapy affect my bowel movements?**

Diarrhea, loose, or soft stools can occur as a result of radiation treatments to the abdomen, pelvis, or stomach. People develop diarrhea because radiation harms the healthy cells in the large and small bowels. Usually change in bowel movements occur around 2 weeks into radiation and continue until approximately 2-3 weeks after radiation treatments are completed. It is important to stay well hydrated when you are experiencing diarrhea. Make sure you are drinking 8-12 glasses of fluids daily (for example water, sports drinks, fruit juices). Avoid high fiber foods such as raw fruits and vegetables, whole wheat breads and cereals as well as fried or greasy foods, milk and dairy products and spicy foods. Eat foods that are easy on the stomach for example foods that are low in fiber, fat, and lactose. Eat foods that are bland and digest easily (for example: bananas, rice, applesauce, toast or crackers, clear broths, yogurt). Notify your physician or nurse if diarrhea is not controlled by diet to discuss use of medications to help control and manage diarrhea.

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