

RADIOTHERAPY TO THE ABDOMEN AND PELVIS

A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS/FAMILIES



This brochure provides information about Radiotherapy to the Abdomen and Pelvis. It is designed to respond to the questions most frequently asked by patients.



آغا خان یونیورسٹی ہسپتال، کراچی

The Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi.

P.O. Box 3500, Stadium Road, Karachi-74800, Pakistan,

Website: www.aku.edu



Your doctor has prescribed external radiation to the abdomen. The radiation treatments are given while you are lying on your back. It is important that you be in the same position each time your radiation treatments are given. The machine moves around you to give you the treatment.

General side effects

Below are some of the side effects that may happen during the course of treatment as time progresses. Some side effects start gradually, often towards the end of 2 weeks of treatment. Some side effects continue for weeks or months after treatment. Most will be gone about 1 month after treatment is finished. How you feel also depends on other factors, for example whether you have had previous chemotherapy treatments.

1. Nausea and Vomiting

Radiation treatment to the abdomen may cause temporary nausea and/or vomiting. The amount of nausea and vomiting is different for each patient.

It may occur 1 to 6 hours after your treatment. The doctor may prescribe an anti-nausea medication for you before your treatment begins. These drugs may cause drowsiness. Ask your oncologist, nurse or pharmacist if you should drive or operate heavy equipment when taking such medication.

Actions that will help

Do	Don't
Eat small meals frequently throughout the day.	Eat a heavy meal before your treatment.
Take your anti-nausea medication on a regular basis while you have nausea.	Wait for the nausea to get worse before taking your anti-nausea medication.
Eat slowly and chew your food well	Eat spicy or fatty foods, and foods with a strong smell.
Try a clear liquid diet (broth and juices) for severe upset stomach.	Have liquids with meals.
Try eating foods that are cold or at room temperature. Smells from hot food often make nausea worse.	

Do	Don't
Drink plenty of fluids between meals such as water, fruit juices, or sour juices.	
Jello and ice lollies can also help reduce nausea and maintain fluid intake.	
Snacks such as dry crackers or toast may be helpful.	
Eat foods that you enjoy, and make the food interesting and appealing.	

2. Diarrhoea

When treatment is given to the abdomen area, the radiation may irritate your bowel. This can lead to diarrhoea, cramps or bloating. This usually happens in the second or third week of treatment.

Diarrhoea more than 2 or 3 times per day, or the appearance of mucus or blood in your bowel movements should be reported to your nurse, doctor or therapist.

Actions that will help

Do	Don't
Eat cooked, peeled or canned fruits and vegetables.	Eat fiber such as nuts and whole grain cereals or bread.
Increase your fluid intake to at least 8 - 10 glasses per day	Eat fruits or vegetables with skins or seeds, such as cucumbers, spinach, loki or grapes.
Reduce the intake of tea and coffee (caffeine) and alcohol.	Eat fatty, greasy and spicy foods.
Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day.	

If these simple measures are not effective, your doctor can prescribe medication. Sometimes it may be necessary to have a pause in your treatment to allow your bowel to recover.

If the anus becomes sore because of frequent bowel movements, warm Sitz baths may help.

Diarrhoea may continue for a few weeks after you have finished your treatments. During this time, continue to use medications as directed by your doctor. Also see advice under "Actions that will help". A normal diet may be resumed slowly.

3. Tiredness

You may feel tired throughout your treatment, but most people recover their energy 1-2 months after radiation is completed. During radiation therapy, the body uses a lot of energy for healing. You may also be tired because of stress related to your illness, daily trips for treatment, lowered blood counts, pain, lack of sleep, poor appetite, and the effects of radiation on normal cells.

Actions that will help

Do	Don't
If you start to feel tired, limit your activities and use your free time in a restful way, and only do the work that is most important.	*Over work yourself. if you start to feel tired, limit your free time in a restful way, and only do the work that is most important.
Light exercise such as walking may reduce tiredness.	
If you need to take time off from work, speak with your employer to adjust your schedule.	
If required, you can speak with your nurse or doctor on how to deal with the tiredness.	
To help conserve your energy, ask for help from neighbours and relatives for shopping, housework, childcare, and daily work.	



4. Skin

You may notice that your skin in the treatment area is red or irritated a few weeks after you start treatment. It may also feel dry or itchy. Ask your nurse or doctor for advice.

Skin irritation will most likely occur in the perineum, groin (area between the thighs), or the area around the anus.

During radiation therapy, you will need to be very gentle with the skin in the treatment area.

Actions that will help

Do	Don't
Be careful washing the affected area. Use lukewarm water and mild soap such as baby soap.	Scrub the affected area hard, which would result in damaging the skin.
Pat dry with a soft towel.	Wear silk or tight-fitting clothing over the area being treated.
Sitz baths (sitting in a tub of plain warm water). It may soothe itching in the anal area.	Put anything very hot or cold on the treatment area (for example heating pad or ice pack).
Wear loose clothes. Try and wear pure cotton clothes and undergarments.	Use chlorinated pools.
Report any redness, rash, itching or skin breakdown to your nurse or doctor.	Apply any powder, perfume, deodorant, body oils or creams on the treatment area.
	Smoke.

5. Blood counts

Radiation treatments may lower your blood counts, particularly your white blood cell and platelet counts. Blood tests may be done during your treatment to monitor the levels. If your blood counts become very low, a break in treatment may be needed. Your doctor will discuss this with you if it is necessary.

6. 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 difficulty when passing urine. Cystitis (inflammation of the bladder) may also occur.

Actions that will help

Do	Don't
Drink plenty of fluids during the day.	Drink beverages that contain caffeine, such as coffee and tea.
Drink 2-3 glasses of cranberry, and other liquids	
Reduce fluid intake after dinner in the evening.	
Speak with your Radiation Therapist, Nurse and Doctor in your weekly review session as medications can be prescribed to help alleviate these side effects.	

7. Vaginal Irritation:

Pelvic treatment may cause your vagina to be sore or dry. After treatment is over you may find the dryness persists. A lubricant such as petroleum jelly may be helpful.

8. Fertility and Sexuality

Depending on the area of the abdomen being treated there may be a possibility of injury to the reproductive organs.

Cancer and its treatment can affect your sexual function and feelings. If you and/or your spouse have any questions or concerns, please speak to your Doctor.

If you have any questions, please contact your nurse at:

Radiotherapy Department
Aga Khan University Hospital
Karachi
Phone: 021 3486 1870-2