

Prostate High Dose (HDR) Brachytherapy

Prostate High Dose (HDR) Brachytherapy Pre-treatment Package

What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy (pronounced brack-ee-ther-a-pee) is a form of radiation treatment. It uses a radioactive source that is put in or near the cancer. This allows a high dose of radiation to be given directly to the cancer in your body. HDR (high dose rate) brachytherapy is used to treat cancer in your prostate.

How is brachytherapy delivered?

- The procedure will take about 3 hours.
- There will be several staff in the room.
- You will meet an anesthesiologist (doctor who gives anesthesia). The procedure will happen under general anesthesia (which means you will get medications so you will sleep during the procedure and not remember it).
- The radiation oncologist will put needles into your prostate, through the patch of skin between the scrotum and the anus (called the perineum).
- We will take pictures with an ultrasound machine. We will use the pictures to plan your treatment.
- The treatment is given while you are asleep.
- After the treatment is finished, the needles will be taken out.
- We will wake you up and take you to the recovery room.

**What are your questions? Please ask.
We are here to help you.**

What other appointments will I have?

If you decide to have brachytherapy, you will have another appointment for a planning ultrasound. This will check that you are eligible for brachytherapy. Sometimes the prostate can be too large to allow brachytherapy. In this case, your radiation oncologist will talk about other treatment options with you.

Once the planning ultrasound is done, we will book a date for your brachytherapy.

A nurse and an anesthesiologist will review your file. You will need to have blood work and possibly other tests for them to review. You may need to come back for a separate appointment to meet either the nurse or anesthesiologist, who will talk about anesthesia with you in detail.

Your brachytherapy will also be combined with external radiation treatments. You will need separate appointments for this. You will get another information package which explains the details of external radiation.

Important information for before the ultrasound appointment

You will need to bring a fleet enema to the Cancer Clinic for this planning ultrasound appointment. You can buy a fleet enema at any pharmacy. Ask the pharmacist for directions on how to use it.

What happens at the planning ultrasound appointment?

We will ask you to use the fleet enema mentioned above before the ultrasound. We will bring you into a room and ask you lie on a table. A radiation therapist and a radiation oncologist will be in the room. Your legs will be in stirrups. The radiation oncologist will place the ultrasound probe in your rectum and use this to take pictures. This will show whether you are eligible for brachytherapy. The ultrasound is like the one you had for your biopsy. No biopsies are taken at this appointment.

What do I need to know before my treatment?

Please remember:

DO NOT EAT OR DRINK ANYTHING AFTER MIDNIGHT ON THE NIGHT BEFORE YOUR TREATMENT.

You need to tell your radiation oncologist if you take any blood thinners. This includes Aspirin[®], Coumadin[®], heparin, ibuprofen, Plavix[®], or warfarin. Your radiation oncologist will tell you how many days before brachytherapy to stop taking these medications.

You cannot take any anti-inflammatory medications like Advil[®], Aspirin[®], ibuprofen, Motrin[®], or naproxen for 14 days (2 weeks) before brachytherapy. Tylenol[®] is OK to take.

Starting at 12:01 a.m. on the day **before** brachytherapy, you can drink only clear fluids. For the full day before brachytherapy, drink only clear liquids. You are not allowed to eat any solid foods or drink any milk products. Solid foods or milk products will make the pictures we take during this procedure hard to see.

Foods that are OK	Foods that are NOT allowed
• Water	• Any solid foods
• Apple juice	• Soup (except broth)
• Cranberry juice	• Milk or milk products
• Grape juice	• Juice with pulp
• Orange juice without pulp	
• Clear broth	
• Jell-O [®]	
• Popsicles	
• Coffee or tea (without milk)	
• Gatorade	

You need to do a “bowel prep” to make sure that your bowel is empty for the treatment. The bowel prep uses a medication called **PICO-SALAX[®]**. You need to buy this from your pharmacy. You do not need a prescription.

On the day before brachytherapy, take the **PICO-SALAX[®]** according to the package instructions. Take 1 packet at 8 a.m. and the second packet at 2 p.m. If you are from out of town and will arrive in Halifax by noon, take the **PICO-SALAX[®]** at noon and 6 p.m.

You will need to stay at home or at the Point Pleasant Lodge the day before brachytherapy, as you will have to use the washroom several times. You need to drink lots of clear fluids (at least 2 litres).

You cannot have anything to eat or drink after midnight on the night before the procedure. This includes water, coffee, tea, and gum. The anesthesiologist may tell you to take medications with a small amount of water on the morning of brachytherapy. Please follow the directions of your anesthesiologist.

You will need to bring a fleet enema with you to the Cancer Clinic. You will be asked to take this immediately before the procedure.

Arrive at the Clinic 1 hour before the scheduled time for your procedure.

Make sure to have a drive to and from the Clinic on the day of the procedure, and to have someone stay with you overnight.

What are the side effects of brachytherapy?

Radiation affects normal as well as cancerous cells. When normal cells are damaged, side effects may happen. Common side effects of brachytherapy are trouble urinating, trouble with bowel movements, tiredness, infection, and effects on erections.

- **Trouble urinating (peeing)** Trouble urinating is common after brachytherapy. Common side effects include:
 - › Urinating more often
 - › A burning feeling, or mild pain, with urination
 - › Trouble starting the stream of urine
 - › Weak stream of urine
 - › A feeling of not being able to empty your bladder fully
 - › Waking up at night to urinate (drinking less fluid after 6 p.m. can help)

These symptoms get better over time. They typically last for at least 3 months, and sometimes longer. Your radiation oncologist will talk with you about using a medication called **tamsulosin** (or Flomax®) to help.

Some foods and liquids can irritate (bother) the bladder and make these symptoms worse. If you are having trouble urinating, you can try stopping certain foods and drinks like:

- Coffee, tea, and other drinks with caffeine
- Pop or soda
- Spicy foods
- Alcohol
- Citrus foods (oranges, orange juice, grapefruit)

Rarely, this trouble urinating can be bad enough that you might need to have a catheter put in your bladder for a while. You should go to the emergency department if you can't urinate. About 1 in 20 patients will temporarily need a catheter, and most of the time it happens in the first 2 weeks after brachytherapy.

- **Fatigue (tiredness)**

- › Fatigue caused by brachytherapy is usually mild. You may be more tired after a usual activity or you may need to rest more than normal.

- **Trouble with bowel movements**

- › Brachytherapy may cause soreness with bowel movements for a few weeks after treatment. It is important to prevent constipation after brachytherapy. You can take stool softeners or laxatives if constipation happens. You may also need to have bowel movements more often. Please talk to your doctor if you have any of these problems.

- **Sexual problems**

- › Brachytherapy can cause men to have problems getting or keeping erections. Please talk about this with your doctor. Medications can help with this problem. It is a good idea to treat problems with erections as soon as you notice them. Early treatment makes it more likely that you will keep having erections in the future.
- › There is usually no reason to stop being sexually active during radiation treatment. You may go back to having intercourse (sex) as soon as you feel comfortable.
- › Some men have pain or discomfort with ejaculation for the first few weeks after treatment. There can be small amounts of blood in the semen as well. The amount of semen may decrease over time. There is no risk of passing radiation to your partner.

- › Brachytherapy may affect your ability to father a child. Sperm banking may be an option and needs to be talked about **before radiation begins**.
- › Please ask your doctor, nurse, or radiation therapist if you would like more information about sexual changes from radiation treatment or brachytherapy.
- **Infection**
 - › Infection of the bladder or prostate can happen after brachytherapy. If you have a fever or chills after brachytherapy, you should see a doctor right away, or go to the emergency department.
- **Bleeding or bruising**
 - › You will probably have a small amount of bleeding in the skin where the needles go in. Ice packs can help with this problem. It is common to have bruising in this area and in the scrotum. This will go away on its own.
- **Long term effects (months or years after treatment)**
 - › Problems related to brachytherapy can happen a long time after treatment is finished. This can include bleeding from the bowel or bladder. These problems are not common. It is possible that this will be a serious problem, though serious problems are very rare. Please tell your doctor if any of these problems happen.
- **Other precautions**

Avoid any heavy lifting or exercise for 1 week after brachytherapy. If you are working, ask your doctor about when you can return to work.

There will be no radiation left in your body after brachytherapy. You will not be radioactive. You do not need to take any precautions around other people because of the radiation treatment you will receive.

What happens after treatment?

We will take you to a recovery room in the Cancer Centre. A nurse will look after you. Your family can wait in the main waiting room of the Cancer Centre. You can go home once you wake up fully and once you are able to urinate. This will take about 2 hours.

Before you leave, you should know:

- You will likely have external radiation treatment starting in about 2 weeks. You will have an appointment for radiation markings (called your “simulation appointment”) to plan this part of your treatment.
- You will get another information package which explains things to be aware of after brachytherapy.
- You will need prescriptions for medications to take afterwards.
- You must have a responsible adult to take you home and stay with you for 24 hours.
- Do not drive or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours.
- Do not drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Do not sign any legal documents or important papers for 24 hours.
- You should drink lots of fluids (like water) in the first few days after brachytherapy.

Do I need to have external radiation too?

Your doctor will talk to you about whether you need to have external radiation treatments. This is sometimes recommended to treat any cancer that may have spread outside of your prostate. This usually starts about 2 weeks after brachytherapy. External radiation is delivered with treatment every weekday for 3 to 5 weeks. If this is recommended, you will get another info package explaining this in more detail.

How will I know if the treatment worked?

Your radiation oncologist will ask you to get your blood work checked over time. He or she will be watching your PSA (prostate specific antigen) level. This is the best way of telling how the treatments worked. The PSA level should come close to zero over time. It can take a few years for this to happen.

Sometimes the PSA can start rising after treatment before falling on its own. This is called a “PSA bounce”. Though this may worry you, no treatment is needed and it does not mean the cancer has come back.

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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