

Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy: Treatment to the Abdomen

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What will happen on the day I come for my simulation markings appointment?

Your first visit to the radiation therapy department is called your simulation marking appointment. This will take about 1 hour.

A CT scan will be done with you lying on your back. It is important that you lie still. Your Radiation Therapists will make every effort to make you comfortable during the CT scan. They will explain every step of what they are doing. Your CT scan will be used to plan your treatments.

As the last step, your Radiation Therapists may give you up to 5 small tattoo markings. They will be used each treatment day to position you.

After your simulation marking appointment, you may have some extra ink on your skin. It can be washed off when you get home.

At your simulation marking appointment, your Radiation Treatment Team members will answer any questions you may have. Many people find it helpful to bring someone along to this appointment.

How long will it be until I start my radiation treatments?

After your simulation marking appointment, you will usually wait a few weeks before your treatments start as it takes time to create your individual treatment plan. You will be notified of the start date for your radiation treatment as soon as your treatment plan is completed, and a time has been booked for the radiation treatment machine. Every effort will be made to start your treatments as soon as possible.

How long will my treatments take?

You should expect to have 1-5 weeks of radiation treatments. The treatments are usually given 5 days a week, Monday to Friday, except for holidays but this may vary. Each treatment appointment will take about 15-45 minutes. If you are booked to see your Radiation Oncologist and/or Oncology Nurse, be prepared to be here longer that day.

What side effects will I have during the radiation treatments (and the first few weeks after)?

In general, radiation to the abdomen area causes moderate side effects. For most people, side effects tend to appear midway through the course of your radiation treatments and peak 1 or 2 weeks after the treatments are finished. Usually these side effects go away over the next 4-8 weeks.

If you have questions during your treatments, please ask a member of your Radiation Treatment Team.

Common side effects include:

- **Fatigue (Tiredness)**

- › Levels of fatigue can vary from patient to patient. You may be more tired than normal after usual activity and may need a nap or rest after each treatment.
- › For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet, Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue: <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/nshccp4030>.

- **Skin Reaction**

- › Skin reactions are uncommon but possible. Your skin in the treatment area may become dry and itchy or pink. Some patients may have increased darkening of the skin (hyperpigmentation). Skin reactions may happen on the front, back or sides of your body.
- › You are allowed to wash and bathe. Your tattoo marks will not wash off. Try not to scratch or rub the affected area.
- › For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet, Skin Care During Radiation Therapy: <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSCCP1237>.
- › If you are experiencing any of these side effects, please let any member of your cancer care team know.

- **Nausea and Vomiting**

- › Some patients have nausea (the feeling of wanting to throw up) and possibly even vomiting (throwing-up) as a result of their radiation treatments. If this happens, you should tell a member of your Radiation Treatment Team. Medications can be used to help with the nausea. You will also be given a patient education pamphlet with suggestions for managing any nausea, Nausea and Vomiting: <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSCCP0014>.

- **Diarrhea**

- › Diarrhea is an increase in the number and looseness of your bowel movements. You may have gas and cramps before you have diarrhea. You will know that you have diarrhea if your bowel movements become loose, even watery, and more frequent. The bowel movements may become difficult to control. For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet, Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy: Diarrhea, <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSCCP1007>.

How will the treatments affect my sexuality?

Most people with cancer (and their partners) experience a number of physical, emotional, and practical changes. These changes can happen during treatment and recovery and may affect your sexual health. There may be changes in how you feel that may affect how you respond sexually. Reactions of a partner can also add to how you see yourself as a sexual being. You may notice periods of time during treatment and recovery when you have little interest in sex.

This may be upsetting to you and your partner. You may have worries (about your cancer, treatments, and how the illness is affecting your life) and these can affect both your own and your partner's interest in and enjoyment of sex.

If you are single, you may have different worries and challenges, such as how to talk about sexuality and cancer with a new partner.

Questions you may want to ask your health care team

- Do I have to do anything to prepare for my radiation markings appointment or treatments?
- What should I expect to happen during my treatments?
- How will I cope with the side effects?
- What happens when the treatments end?
- Do I need to come back for a checkup?
- Will I have any long-term side effects from my treatments?
- Will the radiation treatments cause sterility?
- Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns about supportive care; for example, medication costs, insurance, home care, transportation, emotional concerns, or any other questions?
- Is there a research study for my cancer type that might be appropriate for me? (or that I could be involved in?)

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

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

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only.

It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.