

# External Beam Radiotherapy for Patients Receiving Brachytherapy for Prostate Cancer



**Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program**

[www.nscancercare.ca](http://www.nscancercare.ca)

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## **What is external beam radiotherapy (EBRT)?**

External beam radiotherapy is a treatment that uses radiation from high energy X-ray machines to kill cancer cells.

## **Why is EBRT being given?**

EBRT has been recommended by your doctor to treat any cancer which may have spread outside of the prostate area. It is sometimes given as a precaution even when there are no signs of cancer having spread.

Some men receive EBRT for prostate cancer without brachytherapy. The amount of EBRT used is less for men who are also getting brachytherapy.

## **What appointments are needed?**

For men receiving brachytherapy, EBRT is usually given in 15 or 23 treatments. Your radiation oncologist will talk with you about what is recommended for you. There is 1 appointment needed before EBRT for radiation planning. It is usually scheduled 1 or 2 days after brachytherapy.

## **What happens at the radiation planning appointment?**

This appointment will take about 1 hour. You will be asked to come early and drink some water. You will have a CT scan. This is used to plan your treatments. Small tattoos will be placed on your body. These are used to help get you in the right position for your treatments. They are very small and will not be noticeable to anyone else.

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

### **What will happen when I come for treatment?**

Your treatment will take about 15 minutes each time. You will meet radiation therapists who will supervise your treatment. The treatments are painless. Many people drive themselves to and from their treatments.

### **What are the side effects of EBRT?**

Most men will continue having side effects from their brachytherapy during the time they are having EBRT. The most common side effect from brachytherapy is trouble urinating. EBRT can also cause trouble urinating. This means that you might have more burning with urination or the stream might get weaker.

Sometimes men will have diarrhea or soreness with bowel movements. Some men may have blood or mucous in their bowel movements. Please talk to your radiation oncologist if this happens. These side effects usually get better after several weeks.

Many men will get tired during EBRT. This can sometimes last for a few months after treatment is finished. It is hard to guess how long the side effects will last. It is different for everyone.

### **Do I need to follow any instructions for radiation planning and treatment?**

It is important that your bladder is the same fullness everyday for your CT Scan and treatment.

### **For your CT Scan/marking appointment:**

- Try to drink 5-6 glasses of water between the time you leave the Cancer Centre after your Brachy procedure and your CT Scan (marking) appointment.
- After you check in, the clerks will instruct you to empty your bladder and drink 500ml of water right away. Do not drink any other fluids while you are waiting for your markings.
- Do not empty your bladder again until after your markings are done.

### **For your daily treatment:**

Make sure your rectum is empty by using PEG 3350 (if you have not had a bowel movement, you may not be able to have your treatment).

### **Three days before you start your treatment and while on treatment:**

- Increase your fluid intake by drinking as much water as you comfortably can manage. Try for 8-10 large cups per day.
- Every day take 17 grams of PEG 3350.

### **Make sure your bladder is full by following these instructions:**

- 45 minutes before your appointment, empty your bladder (pee).
- Drink 500 ml of water right away.
- Do not drink any other fluids while you are waiting for treatment.
- Do not empty your bladder until after your treatment is over.

If you have difficulty holding your bladder full please tell a member of the staff.

### **What if I have more trouble urinating during EBRT?**

Please talk to your radiation oncologist if you are having more trouble urinating during EBRT. Sometimes there are things that you eat or drink that can make this worse. Sometimes your medications can be changed or new medications can be given. There is more information about this in the prostate brachytherapy pamphlets.

It is important to know that there is a chance that the problems urinating can be bad enough that you may need to have a catheter put in. This is needed if you are not able to urinate. If you feel that you cannot urinate, go to the emergency department.

If you have a fever, it may be a sign of infection. Talk to your radiation oncologist or family doctor, or go to the emergency department if you have a fever.

### **What should I do with medications that were given for brachytherapy?**

Your radiation oncologist may have prescribed a medication called tamsulosin (Flomax®). This medication helps with trouble urinating. You will probably need this for at least a few months after you finish your EBRT. Some men will need this medication for longer.

Once you feel that your problems urinating have gotten better, you can try cutting back on this medication to every second day. If you are taking it every second day and are not having problems urinating, you can try to stop taking it. Men will often need to re-start taking this medication because the trouble urinating comes back.

Please call your radiation oncologist if you have any questions.

Your radiation oncologist may have prescribed an antibiotic. You can stop taking this once the prescription runs out.

If you have been prescribed meloxicam, you can stop taking this once the prescription runs out (usually 1 month).

If you take blood thinner medications (warfarin, heparin, Fragmin<sup>®</sup>, Pradaxa<sup>®</sup>), you can start taking them again the day after your brachytherapy.

### **When can I start having sex again?**

You can start having sex as soon as you are comfortable. There is no risk of harm to you or your partner. This is true whether you are in an opposite-sex relationship or a same-sex relationship.

You may notice discomfort with orgasm or with intercourse for the first few times after brachytherapy. This is normal. Your health care team would be happy to talk with you if you have questions about how treatment might affect your sex life.

### **How will I know if my treatment has worked?**

It can take a long time to know if your treatment has worked. Your radiation oncologist will watch your PSA (blood test) level. This should get close to zero over time. It can take many months or even a few years for this to happen. It is important to be patient. Your radiation oncologist may need to check your prostate.

Sometimes your PSA level can rise after treatment. This is often normal and does not mean that the treatment isn't working. This is sometimes called "PSA bounce".

### **What appointments will I have after I finish treatment?**

You will have an appointment to see your radiation oncologist in about three months. You will be asked to have blood work done about 1 week before this appointment.



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