Your health care provider suggests radiation to your abdominal area as part of your cancer treatment. This sheet discusses possible side effects and ways to manage them.

**Possible Side Effects**

**Nausea or loss of appetite.** This depends on the size and location of your treatment area and the dose of radiation you receive. If nausea occurs, it usually begins two to six hours after treatment. Let your health care provider know if you feel sick.

- Eat small amounts of food several times a day instead of three large meals.
- Eat something light such as crackers or toast before your treatment.
- Avoid lying flat after eating.
- Take a medicine to reduce nausea before treatment.

It is important to eat well. Your health care team will check your weight every week. They will also check to see you are eating and drinking enough.

**Heartburn.** Radiation to the upper stomach area can cause heartburn. You may feel as if you have a lump when you swallow or that food sticks in your throat.

- Avoid acidic and spicy foods.
- Include soft foods in your diet.
- Try liquid supplements such as Ensure® or Carnation Instant Breakfast®.
- Try antacids such as Mylanta® or Maalox®, or acid blockers such as Zantac® or Pepcid AC®.

**Diarrhea.** Radiation may cause diarrhea if the bowel area is part of your treatment. Tell your health care team if you have diarrhea. They can suggest diet changes or over-the-counter medicines such as Imodium® that may help. If these are not helpful, your health care provider may prescribe a medication.

These suggestions may also help:

- Use alcohol-free baby wipes rather than toilet paper to wipe after bowel movements.
- Rinse the anal area using a squirt bottle with water after each movement.
- Treat the anal area if it becomes sore or if you develop hemorrhoids. Over-the-counter products Anusol® or Preparation H® can help. Sitting in a warm bath with water above the hips may also help with soreness or hemorrhoids.

**Skin changes.** The effects of radiation on the skin depend on a number of factors:

- Number of treatments
- Total dose of radiation
- Body part or parts radiated
- Prior sun exposure of the radiated skin
- Other factors such as overall health

After a week or two of treatments, your skin will start to become dry or may darken, turn pink to red, itch, or feel tender. The skin may also peel or develop blisters. Skin reactions happen gradually and may last for a while after treatment ends. Most skin changes are temporary and go away after two to four weeks.

Side effects to the skin happen only in areas where the radiation enters and exits your body. If you are unsure where your treated areas are, ask your health care team. You should take care of your skin from the first day of radiation, before you notice any changes.

Here are some guidelines to help protect your skin:

- Wash skin gently with warm water. Do not scrub. Use your hand instead of a washcloth and pat dry with a soft towel.
- Use a mild soap that is free of perfumes or deodorants.
- Wear loose-fitting cotton clothes. Do not wear tight-fitting clothes that can cause friction.
• Do not use adhesive products such as bandages or tape in the treated area.
• Avoid temperature extremes. Do not place heating pads, ice packs, or hot water bottles on the treated skin.
• Avoid exposing treated skin to the sun; it will be more sensitive. Use a PABA-free sunscreen with at least SPF 30 when outdoors and wear a wide-brimmed hat. Avoid tanning beds.
• Use only an electric razor if you shave within the treated area.

Follow these suggestions to help treat skin reactions:
• Apply a moisturizing cream, lotion, gel, or oil to radiated skin. Choose products for sensitive skin, and avoid products with perfume or deodorant.
• If a product stings, stop using it.
• If your skin becomes tender or itchy, try using an over-the-counter, one-percent hydrocortisone cream. If necessary, your health care provider may prescribe a steroid cream.

**Hair loss.** After about two weeks, you will start to lose hair in the area that was treated. It will usually begin to grow back within three to six months after radiation treatment ends. Hair loss may be permanent and depends on the amount of radiation you receive.

**Fatigue.** Feeling tired is common. It is important to take good care of yourself while you are in treatment. Many patients find that mild exercise such as walking can improve their energy level. However, your level of activity should depend on what you feel like doing. If you feel very tired, you may need extra rest.

**Symptoms may go on after your last treatment.**

If you have any concerns, please call your health care provider.