

PALLIATIVE RADIATION

(The following information is based on the general experiences of many prostate cancer patients. Your experience may be different.)

What is Palliative Radiation Therapy?

Palliative radiation therapy is radiation therapy that is used to lessen bone pain when prostate cancer has spread to the bones. Palliative radiation therapy does not cure your prostate cancer but it is very helpful as a treatment to make you more comfortable. Radiation therapy uses high-energy rays to destroy cancer cells or slow their growth in your bones.

When prostate cancer cells grow in the bones, the radiation therapy will destroy or slow the growth of these cells. When the cancer cells are destroyed or slowed by the radiation, your pain will get better and you may be able to lower the amount of pain medication you need to take.

How is Palliative Radiation Therapy Given?

Palliative radiation therapy is usually given by external beam radiation. Radiation beams from an x-ray machine will be carefully focused on the areas of your bones that have the prostate cancer. You will get markings or temporary tattoos on these areas that will get radiation therapy.

What Will Happen When I Get Palliative Radiation Therapy?

During your first palliative radiation appointment a radiation specialist will make marks or temporary tattoos on your skin to show exactly where to place the radiation beams. This is called a simulation appointment. It is important not to wash these marks off your skin for the whole time that you are getting your palliative radiation therapy. The simulation appointment may last longer than your other radiation treatment appointments.

You will begin your radiation therapy at your next appointment. Each treatment will last only a few minutes. You will be taken to a changing room to put on a hospital gown. You will go into the radiation therapy room and the radiation technician will help you onto the table and into the right position for your treatment. The radiation technician will go outside the room and you will get your treatment. After your treatment is done, the technician will come back into the room to help you get off the table. You will go get dressed and be able to go home.

How Many Treatments Will I Need?

Your doctor will let you know how many radiation treatments you will need to give you the best relief from your bone pain. Everyone is different. You can expect to have from 5 to 15 radiation treatments. This means a treatment each day for 1 to 3 weeks. If you have problems getting transportation to your radiation treatments, speak to your nurse case manager.

During your treatments, you may have blood tests that will show how your body is doing. Check with your nurse case manager to find out where you need to have your blood work done or call IMPACT at 1-800-409-8252 to find this out. When you have a blood test, a small amount of blood will be taken with a needle from your arm.

How Long Will It Take Before I Feel Less Bone Pain?

It may take 2 to 3 radiation treatments for your bone pain to be less. You may need to continue to take your pain medication while you get your radiation treatments. By the time your treatments are done, you may have better pain relief and need less pain medication. The goal of palliative

radiation treatment is to control your pain so that you take less pain medication and can do the activities that you may want to do.

Are There Side Effects?

Yes, there can be side effects with palliative radiation therapy. Some side effects depend on what part of your body is getting the radiation. The common side effects that you may have are:

- skin irritation where the radiation beam is placed,
- fatigue or tiredness
- diarrhea
- not having an appetite (not feeling like eating).

What Can I Do If I Get Any Side Effects?

For skin irritation:

- Wash the irritated area gently with warm water only.
- Ask your radiation doctor about lotions that you may use on your skin. Do not use any cream or lotion on your skin near your radiation markings without asking your radiation doctor first.
- Wear soft, loose clothing over the area of skin that may be irritated.

For fatigue or tiredness:

- Rest when you feel tired.
- Take naps during the day.
- Plan rest time before activities.
- Ask family and friends for help with daily activities like shopping, cooking, laundry, and driving.

For poor appetite:

- Eat 5 to 6 small meals a day instead of 2 to 3 big ones.
- Pick foods that you like to eat. During your palliative radiation therapy, do not be worried about the number of calories you are eating. The foods that you eat will help strengthen your body.
- Use easy-to-eat, high nutrition foods like milkshakes, eggnog, pudding, custards, and flan.

For diarrhea:

- If you have diarrhea, eat bananas, grated apples, applesauce, boiled white rice, tapioca, toast, and cream of rice cereal. Eating these foods will help stop your diarrhea.
- If you have diarrhea, drinking beverages and eating foods that are "clear," such as apple juice and ginger ale will also be helpful. These are usually gentler on your stomach and easier to digest.
- Stay away from vegetables that are hard to digest, such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and corn.
- Stay away from spicy foods, such as chili.
- Talk to your doctor about taking over-the-counter medications like Metamucil.

Remember to call your doctor or nurse case manager if you have any questions or worries about any side effects.