

Managing Symptoms of Prostate Cancer

Bowel Problems After Radiation

If you have bowel problems after radiation, you may feel embarrassed. Don't let this stop you from asking for help.

Sometimes, radiation for prostate cancer can cause bowel problems, including:

- Cramping
- Very loose or runny stools (diarrhea)
- Feeling of pressure to have a bowel movement right away
- Burning, tenderness, or pain
- Gas

- Mucus discharge which is thick and stringy
- Bleeding with bowel movements or blood in your stools

You may feel embarrassed that your body behaves in this way. Don't let this stop you from asking your health care team for help. Doctors and nurses deal with this every day.

How does radiation treatment cause bowel problems?

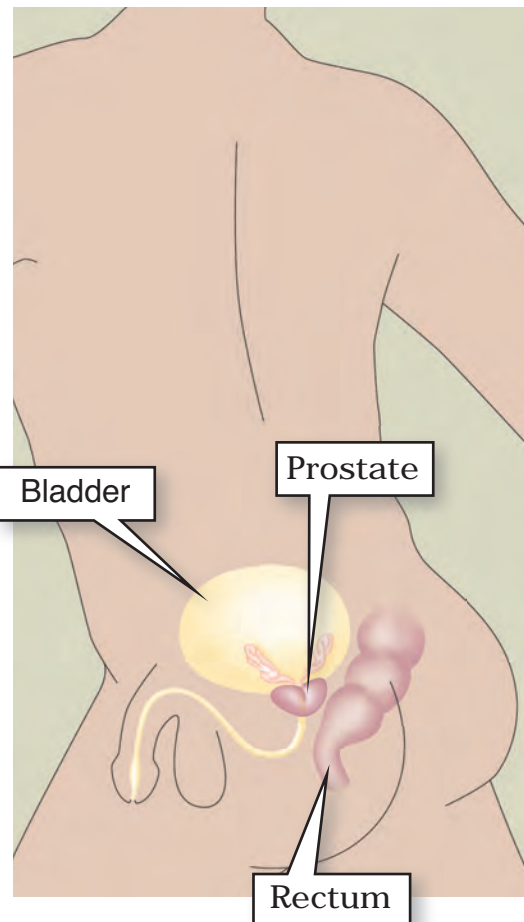
Radiation can damage cells.

When radiation is used to treat your prostate cancer, it can damage cells in other nearby body parts. These include the bowel (your intestines or guts) and the rectum, the end of the intestines that has an opening out of the body. Body waste is stored in your rectum until it passes out as a bowel movement or stool.

Problems can start after 3 to 4 weeks of treatment.

For many men, bowel problems start a few weeks after treatment begins.

Problems often stop when treatment ends. Bowel problems usually end within a few weeks after treatment is finished. However, for some men, problems are more long lasting.



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How can I manage bowel problems?

Keep a record of your problems for about a week or two.

Write down:

- *Symptoms* such as pain, gas, cramping, or skin problems around your rectum
- *Problems* with loose, runny stools (diarrhea). Describe your stools as well as you can. Write how often you go and whether there is blood or mucus in them.
- *Foods or activities* you think may cause the problem.

When you visit your doctor or nurse, take your record. It will help them help you.

Talk with your doctor or nurse.

Bowel problems may embarrass you, but keep in mind that doctors and nurses talk to patients with these problems every day. Take your problem record to share with your health care team. They may suggest certain medicines to relieve diarrhea, such as:

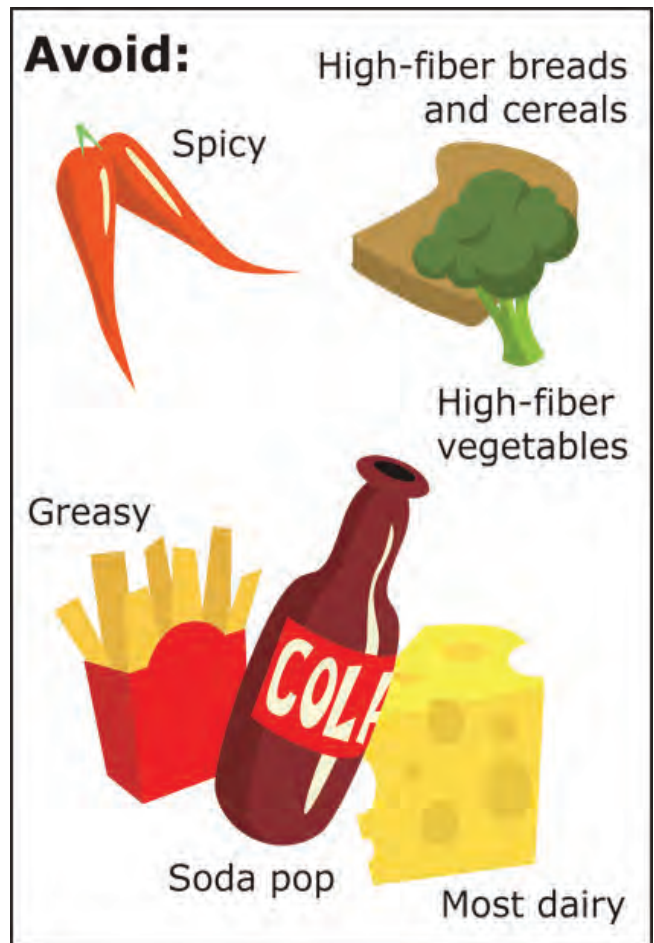
- Over the counter medicines such as Kaopectate, Imodium, and Lomotil
- Prescription medicine

If you use these, be sure to follow instructions so you don't over do it and get "blocked up."

Other medicines can relieve cramping and pain. Certain creams can ease soreness around the rectum or other skin problems. Be sure to ask for what you need.

Consider making changes in your eating habits and the foods you eat.

- *Eating habits* that may help with bowel problems
 - Eat 5–6 small meals a day instead of 3 big meals.
 - Eat foods at room temperature. Very hot and cold foods can be hard on the bowels.



- Eat slowly so you swallow less air.
- Don't chew gum.

- *Foods to limit or avoid* because they may bother the bowels or cause gas
 - Very spicy foods, such as those made with pepper, chili powder, curry, and cloves
 - Sodas and other bubbly drinks
 - High-fiber foods such as whole grain bread, bran cereals, nuts, seeds, popcorn, fresh or dried fruits
 - High-fiber vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, peas, corn, dried beans, raw salads
 - Fried, greasy or fatty foods such as French fries, chips, pastries, gravies

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— Most milk products IF you are sensitive to them. Doctors call this 'lactose intolerance.' Usually, yogurt, buttermilk, and nutrition drinks (like Ensure or Boost) are OK.

- *Foods to eat that* are easy on the bowels
 - Baked or broiled fish, skinless chicken, lean meats
 - Mild processed cheese
 - Boiled eggs
 - Smooth peanut butter
 - Fruits such as bananas, applesauce, canned peaches and pears, peeled apples, apple and grape juice
 - White bread or toast, rice, noodles, Cream of Wheat
 - Potatoes (baked, boiled, or mashed) and well-cooked mild vegetables such as green beans, carrots, asparagus tips, squash

Drink lots of fluids – at least 8 to 10 glasses of water each day.

Drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water each day will help your body and help you feel better. If you have heart or kidney problems, ask your doctor or nurse how much you can drink.

- *If you have diarrhea*, you will lose a lot of fluid that needs to be replaced. You may also need to replace sodium and potassium, minerals important to your body. Your health care team may recommend drinks such as Gatorade, which contain these minerals. They may also suggest eating foods that have potassium such as bananas, potatoes, red meat, and vegetable juices. If you have more than 5 stools a day or diarrhea that lasts more than one day, write down how much you are drinking.
- *Limit caffeine*. Caffeine can irritate the bowels and also make you lose fluids. Avoid or drink only small amounts of coffee, tea, or soft drinks.

Okay to eat:

Many fruits and juices



skinless chicken



baked or broiled fish

lean meat



Boiled eggs



White bread, rice

Mild vegetables (cooked carrots, etc.)



Smooth peanut butter

Other tips to help you feel better

- Cut down or don't use alcohol and tobacco. These irritate the bowel and may make your diarrhea worse.
- Decrease and manage stress. Learn new ways to handle stress in the tip sheet on "Coping with Cancer Stress."
- Use comfort measures such as a warm bath to soothe a sore bottom. A hot water bottle wrapped in a towel and placed on your belly may help with cramps.
- Gently clean and dry after each bowel movement, using mild baby wipes. Apply soothing lotions or ointments after cleaning and drying. Tucks and Anusol are 2 brand names. Ask your doctor or nurse what products they would suggest.

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When should I see or call my doctor or nurse?

Call your health care team if:

- *The diarrhea or rectal pain does not go away.*
- *You see red blood in the toilet or on the toilet paper after a bowel movement. You should never assume that this is due to the radiation as there are other causes of bowel bleeding.*
- *You have a fever above 100.5 degrees with diarrhea.*
- *You have signs of dehydration such as fatigue, weakness, dizziness, dry skin, fast heart rate, and little urine.*



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This fact sheet contains general information and is not meant to replace consultation with your doctor or nurse.

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