
Internal vaginal or uterine radiotherapy (brachytherapy)

What is radiotherapy?

Radiotherapy is a localized cancer treatment, which is used to destroy cancer cells. Radiotherapy is planned individually. Medical imaging from the treatment area is used to create a treatment plan. Each treatment time, imaging is carried out with the applicator in place in the vagina.

How will you prepare for treatment?

Radiotherapy does not require any preparation at home. On the day of the treatment, eat a light breakfast and lunch and take your usual medications.

How is radiotherapy administered?

A gynecologist carries out your first radiotherapy treatment, and a nurse carries out the subsequent treatments. During the treatment, you will lie down on your back in the gynecologic examination position.

Radiotherapy is administered through an applicator that has been inserted into the vagina. You must stay still and you may breathe normally. You are alone in the treatment room, but the staff can see you and talk with you. The treatment lasts for 30 to 45 minutes, of which radiotherapy lasts for 5 to 10 minutes. Radiotherapy does not cause pain and you will not give off radiation after the treatment.

The treatment is usually administered 3 to 5 times every 2 to 7 days. Radiotherapy treatments are usually carried out as outpatient care. You can be prescribed medical leave for the duration of the radiotherapy if necessary.

What side effects can the treatment have?

Radiotherapy also affects healthy cells. As such, it can cause side effects in the treatment area, and these can vary from person to person. The most common ones are:

- irritation and dryness of the vaginal mucosa
- more frequent need to urinate
- burning sensation during urination
- diarrhea

After radiotherapy has concluded, you can resume your daily routines; the treatment rarely prevents you from carrying out everyday chores, engaging with your hobbies, or working. We recommend that you rest as needed during your treatment and eat a varied diet.

Managing side effects

The medical staff can instruct you in how to manage the side effects of treatment. The side effects can continue even after the treatment has been concluded, and you should mention them during your follow-up visits.

Taking care of your hygiene during the treatment is important to avoid infections. We recommend washing your genital area every morning and evening using only water. You can shower, but we recommend you avoid bathing in a bathtub, going to the sauna, and swimming.

Mucosal irritation caused by the radiotherapy can cause vaginal pain, which can be managed using regular pain medication.

Mood swings and fear of the future are natural reactions to being diagnosed with an illness. Talking about this with your loved ones and the medical staff can help you clear your thoughts.

Sexuality

Radiotherapy does not prevent sexual intercourse. However, falling ill and the treatments can cause lack of sexual desire. You may be forced to examine your self-image and sexual identity from a new perspective. Talking about these problems openly with your partner, nurses, sexual counsellor and your doctor will usually help you overcome these issues as well.

Vaginal stenosis can cause painful intercourse and/or problems with intercourse. A sexual counsellor can give you instructions on how to treat vaginal stenosis.

What happens after radiotherapy?

Your treatment follow-ups continue at the Tyks Lighthouse hospital's gynaecological outpatient clinic, section J.

Contact the clinic during office hours, if

- you experience lower abdominal pain, fever, or foul-smelling discharge.
- you have other symptoms that you suspect are caused by your illness or the radiation therapy
- you have further questions regarding the treatment you have received or your follow-up treatment.