

How Should I Care for Myself During Radiation Therapy?

Get plenty of rest.

Many patients experience fatigue during radiation therapy, so it is important to make sure you are well rested. If possible, ask friends and family to help out during treatment, by running errands and preparing meals. This will help you get the rest you need to focus on fighting your cancer.

Follow doctor's orders.

In many cases, your doctor will ask you to call if you develop a fever of 101 degrees or higher. Be sure to read your instructions as far as caring for yourself during treatment.

Eat a balanced, nutritious diet.

A nutritionist, nurse or doctor may work with you to make sure you are eating the right foods to get the vitamins and minerals you need. With certain types of radiation, you may need to change your diet to minimize side effects. You should not attempt to lose weight during radiation therapy since you need more calories due to your cancer and treatment.

Treat the skin that is exposed to radiation with extra care.

The skin in the area receiving treatment may become red and sensitive, similar to getting a sunburn. Your radiation oncology nurse will review specific instructions for caring for your skin with you. Some guidelines include:

- Clean the skin daily with warm water and a mild soap recommended by your nurse.
- Avoid using any lotions, perfumes, deodorants or powders in the treatment area unless approved by your doctor or nurse. Try not to use products containing alcohol and perfumes.
- Avoid putting anything hot or cold on the treated skin. This includes heating pads and ice packs.
- Stay out of the sun. If you must spend time outdoors, wear a hat or clothing to protect your skin. After treatment, use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15.

Seek out support.

There are many emotional demands that you must cope with during your cancer diagnosis and treatment. It is common to feel anxious, depressed, afraid or hopeless. It may help to talk about

your feelings with a close friend, family member, nurse, social worker or psychologist. To find a support group in your area, ask your radiation oncology nurse. There are many support groups that meet in person, over the phone or on the Internet.