

# Home Care Instructions

## After Gynecologic Brachytherapy

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You have been treated with high-dose internal radiation. This type of treatment is also called Brachytherapy.

### After Your Procedure

Discomfort and tenderness in the treated area is common after your procedure. Other common side effects include:

- Redness, irritation and soreness in your vaginal area
- Small amounts of bloody drainage
- Fatigue (feeling tired with or without activity)
- Burning during urination
- Frequent or urgent need to urinate
- Diarrhea or loose stools

### Precautions After Your Procedure

- You were given a medicine (general anesthesia) to make you sleep during the procedure. You may feel drowsy for several hours after the procedure.
- **During the first 24 hours after your procedure:**
  - ▶ It is important to rest.
  - ▶ **Do not** drive or operate any heavy equipment.
  - ▶ **Do not** make any important decisions or sign business papers.
- A caregiver should be with you for the first 4 hours after you leave the hospital or clinic.
- You will be scheduled for a follow up appointment 1 month after your procedure.

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

## Call your doctor if you have:

- Increased amount of pain or pain not relieved by your pain medicine
- Heavy vaginal bleeding (soaking a pad in one hour)
- Vaginal discharge that smells bad
- Chills or a fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit (38.3 degrees Celsius) or higher

## Weekdays (Monday - Friday) between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Call the James Radiation Oncology Department at (614) 293-8415

## On weekdays after 5:00 p.m., weekends and holidays:

Call The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center operator at (614) 293-8000 and ask them to page the Radiation Oncologist on call.

## Your Care at Home

The following instructions will help you or your caregiver when you get home after your procedure.

### Pain Medicines

For mild pain, you may take an over-the-counter medicine, such as:

- Tylenol or Acetaminophen
- Motrin, Advil or generic Ibuprofen

**For moderate pain or pain not controlled with the medicines listed above, please call your doctor.** Your doctor may order a pain medicine for you.

- Take your pain medicine as ordered by your doctor.
- Take your pain medicine before your pain becomes severe.
- As your pain gets better, decrease the amount of pain medicine you take.
- **Do not** drink alcohol, drive, or use heavy equipment when you take your pain medicine.
- Call your doctor if the pain medicine does not control your pain.

**Vaginal Discharge** is normal and you can use feminine pads if needed.

- **Do not** put anything inside your vagina until your doctor says it is okay.
  - ▶ No douching
  - ▶ No sexual intercourse (sex)
  - ▶ No tampons

## **Diet**

- You may eat your regular diet.
- Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, you should drink 8 to 10 cups of non-caffeinated fluid to stay hydrated.
- If you have loose or hard stools, you can change your diet to help.
  - ▶ For loose stools:
    - Follow a low fiber diet or **BRAT diet (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast)**
    - Drink plenty of fluid
      - ▶ Water, sports drinks, broth, and diluted cranberry and grape juice
  - ▶ For hard stools:
    - Drink extra water and other fluids like juice, tea, and broth.
    - Eat foods high in fiber (fruits, vegetables and whole grains).
    - Take an over-the-counter medicine to soften your stool (Docusate or Milk of Magnesia).

## **Activity**

It is important to limit your activity and rest for 24 hours after your procedure.

You may return to work/school on \_\_\_\_\_.

**Fatigue** is the most common side effect of radiation therapy. This may go away after your treatment ends.

## Personal Hygiene

Wash your treated area with soap and warm water. You can take showers and baths.

- **Do not use very hot or very cold temperatures in your treated area.**
  - ▶ **Do not** use hot water bottles, heating pads, or ice packs unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
  - ▶ **Do not** take hot showers or use jacuzzis, hot tubs, or saunas.
- **Do not scratch, rub, or massage your skin.**
  - ▶ Wear loose, comfortable clothes.
  - ▶ If the area itches, call the Radiation Oncology Department.
- **Sitz Bath or Epsom Salt Bath** can help with vaginal irritation.
  - ▶ Add Epsom Salt or baking soda to a warm tub of water. **Do not** use hot water. Follow the instructions on the package.

## Sexual Activity

- **Do not** put anything inside your vagina until your doctor says it is okay.
  - ▶ No douching
  - ▶ No sexual intercourse (sex)
  - ▶ No tampons
- Your doctor will tell you it is okay to have sex. You may need to use personal lubricants during sex. Radiation therapy can cause changes or scar tissue to form in your vagina. Your vagina can become less elastic, dry and tender.
- A **vaginal dilator** will be given to you at your first follow-up appointment. This dilator can be used to help stretch and relax the tissue in your vagina. Your nurse will teach you how to use it.
  - ▶ A vaginal dilator is a smooth plastic or rubber tube that is about 6 inches long and comes in different sizes.
  - ▶ Your doctor will talk to you about how often you need to use the dilator.
  - ▶ Sexual intercourse and the use of the vaginal dilator helps reduce the amount of scar tissue that can happen after radiation therapy.

For more information on vaginal dilators, ask your nurse for the patient education handout: [Vaginal Dilator Exercises](#).