Intravaginal Brachytherapy

This information describes intravaginal brachytherapy, including what to expect during and after treatment.

Introduction

You will be receiving a type of radiation therapy known as brachytherapy. With this type of treatment, a radioactive source is temporarily placed inside the body, in or near a tumor. Only the area where the source is placed will receive radiation. In intravaginal brachytherapy, the source is placed in a cylinder that is placed in your vagina. Most women receive three treatments given every other week. Your doctor may change the timing or number of the treatments. Each treatment will last 5 to 15 minutes.

Before Treatment

There is no special preparation for the treatment. You may eat or drink as you wish. Report to the Brachytherapy suite on the third floor of Radiation Oncology. When you arrive, you will be asked to remove any clothing below your waist and change into a hospital gown. You will then be taken into the Brachytherapy procedure room where your doctor will do a pelvic exam.

Procedure

The doctor will place the cylinder into your vagina. It is similar to but larger than a tampon. You may feel some pressure while it is in place. A cable is then attached to the cylinder. It is connected to a machine that stores the radiation source. Once everything is set up, the staff will leave the room and close the door. A computer sends the sources through the cable and into the cylinder.

You must lie still during the treatment so that the cylinder is not dislodged. Because the sources are placed inside the cylinder, you will not feel them. During the treatment, the staff is able to observe you on a TV camera. You will
be able to talk to them through the intercom. Tell them if you need anything. If necessary, the treatment can be stopped so someone can enter the room. After the treatment is done, the radioactive sources return to the machine. The doctor will then remove the cylinder.

After The Treatment

You may leave the department as soon as the treatment is done. No radiation sources are left inside of you. There are no radiation hazards to you or your family. There is no need to avoid young children or pregnant women.

Early Side Effects

After the treatment, you may notice a pinkish discharge from the vagina. This is expected. The first day or two after the treatment, you may feel pressure or burning when you urinate. You may also feel pressure when you have a bowel movement. These side effects are expected; however, if they do not improve after two days, call your doctor or nurse.

Long Term Side Effects

Vaginal Dryness

You may have vaginal dryness during the treatment and afterwards. Try using a vaginal moisturizer such as Replens® two or three times a week. Call 800-252-0454 if you cannot find it in your drug store.

You may want to use a vaginal lubricant during intercourse. It can increase your comfort. Examples are Astroglide® or K-Y® jelly. Call 800-848-5900 to find out which stores sell Astroglide®.

Never use Vaseline®. It may irritate your vagina.

Vaginal Tightening

You may develop vaginal tightening. This can make the vagina narrower and shorter. If you are sexually active, this may make intercourse painful. If you are not sexually active, these changes may not be a concern. However, they can make it hard for the doctor to do a pelvic exam. A vaginal dilator stretches your vagina. It is similar to a tampon. Using it regularly can minimize narrowing and...
shortening. Your nurse will give you a dilator and teach you how to use it.

If you have any concerns about how intravaginal brachytherapy can affect your sexual health, speak with your doctor or nurse. They can answer your questions and will refer you to a specialist if needed.

We hope you have found this information card helpful. If you have any questions, please call your radiation oncologist or nurse.

If you have any questions or concerns, talk with a member of your healthcare team. You can reach them Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM at ____________________. After 5:00 PM, during the weekend, and on holidays, please call_____________________. If there’s no number listed, or you’re not sure, call 212-639-2000.

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