Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Radiation Therapy to Your Abdomen

This information will help you get ready for radiation therapy to your abdomen (belly) at MSK. It explains what to expect. It also explains how to care for yourself before, during, and after your radiation therapy.

This resource has a lot of information. Different sections may be helpful at different times. We suggest reading through this resource once before you start radiation therapy, so you know what to expect. Then, refer back to it during your radiation therapy.

This information is general. Your radiation therapy team will design a treatment and care plan just for you. Because of that, some parts of your treatment may be different than what's described here. Your radiation therapy team will talk with you about what to expect.

About radiation therapy

Radiation therapy uses high-energy radiation to treat cancer. It works by damaging the cancer cells, making it hard for them to multiply. Your body can then naturally get rid of the damaged cancer cells. Radiation therapy also affects normal cells, but they can fix themselves in a way cancer cells can't.

Radiation therapy takes time to work. It takes days or weeks of treatment before cancer cells start to die. They keep dying for weeks or months after radiation therapy ends.

You can have radiation therapy before, during, or after surgery or chemotherapy.

About external beam radiation therapy

You'll have a type of radiation therapy called external beam radiation therapy. During your treatments, a machine will aim beams of radiation directly at the tumor. The beams will pass through your body and destroy cancer cells in their path. You will not see or feel the radiation.

Your role on your radiation therapy team

Your radiation therapy care team will work together to care for you. You're a part of that team, and your role includes:

- Getting to your appointments on time.

- Asking questions and talking about your concerns.
- Telling us when you have side effects.
- Telling us if you're in pain.
- Caring for yourself at home by:
  - Quitting smoking if you smoke. MSK has specialists who can help. To learn more about our Tobacco Treatment Program, call 212-610-0507. You can also ask your nurse about the program.
  - Caring for your skin based on our instructions.
  - Drinking liquids based on our instructions.
  - Eating or avoiding the foods and drinks we suggest.
  - Staying around the same weight.

Simulation

Before you start radiation therapy, you will have a treatment planning procedure called a simulation. This is done to make sure that:

- Your treatment area is mapped out.
- You get the right dose of radiation.
- The radiation dose to nearby tissue is as small as possible.

During your simulation, you will have imaging scans and

your skin will be marked with little tattoo dots. These marks help your team make sure you're in the correct position for your radiation treatments.

Your simulation will take 2 to 4 hours.

Getting ready for your simulation

- **During your simulation, you will be lying in one position for a long time.** If you think you will be uncomfortable lying still, you can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or your usual pain medication before your simulation.
- If you think you may get anxious during your procedure, ask your doctor if medication may be helpful.
- Wear comfortable clothes that are easy to take off. You will need to change into a hospital gown.
- Don't wear jewelry, powder, or lotion.

To help pass the time during your simulation, your radiation therapists can play music for you.

Depending on the area being treated, you may not be able to eat or drink before your simulation. Your doctor or nurse will talk with you about this.

Take devices off your skin

You may wear certain devices on your skin. Before your simulation or treatment, some device makers recommend you take off your:

- Continuous glucose monitor (CGM)
- Insulin pump

If you use one of these, ask your radiation oncologist if you need to take it off. If you do, make sure to bring an extra device to put on after your simulation or treatment.

You may not be sure how to manage your glucose (blood sugar) while your device is off. If so, before your appointment, talk with the healthcare provider who manages your diabetes care.

Day of your simulation

What to expect when you arrive

A member of your radiation therapy team will check you in when you arrive. They'll give you an identification (ID) wristband with your name and date of birth. During your appointment, many staff members will check your ID wristband and ask you to say and spell your name and date of birth. This is for your safety. People with the same or a similar name may be getting care on the same day.

Your radiation therapists will review what to expect during

the simulation. If you haven't already signed a consent form, they will go over the form with you. They will answer any questions you have and ask for your signature.

You may be asked to drink about 1 cup (8 ounces) of barium. This is a contrast liquid. It will help us see your small intestine on the imaging scans that will be taken later.

During your simulation

You will need to change into a hospital gown for your simulation. You should keep your shoes on. If you wear a head covering (such as a wig, turban, or cap), you may need to remove it.

After you change, your radiation therapists will bring you to the simulation room and help you lie down on the table. They will do everything they can to make sure you're comfortable and have privacy.

The table will have a sheet on it, but it's hard and has no cushion. Also, the room is usually cool. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, tell your radiation therapists. If you haven't taken pain medication and think you may need it, tell your radiation therapists before your simulation starts.

Once your simulation starts, don't move. Moving may change your position. However, if you're uncomfortable or

need help, tell your radiation therapists.

During your simulation, you will feel the table move into different positions. The lights in the room will be turned on and off and you will see red laser lights on each wall. Your radiation therapists use these laser lights as a guide to help position you on the table. Don't look directly into the laser lights, because they may damage your eyes.

There will be an intercom (microphone and speaker) and a camera inside the simulation room. Your radiation therapists will walk in and out of the room during your simulation, but there will always be someone who can see and hear you. You will hear your radiation therapists talking to each other as they work, and they will talk to you and explain what they're doing.

Positioning

You will be lying on your back or on your side. If you're laying on your back, your arms will be raised above your head. You will be in the same position during your simulation and each treatment. To help you stay in the correct position, a mold may be made of your upper body. Your radiation therapists will make this for you.

To make the mold, your radiation therapists will pour warm liquid into a large plastic bag. They will seal the bag and place it on the table. You will lie on top of the bag, either

on your back with your arms raised above your head or on your side.

The liquid will feel warm at first, but it will cool as it hardens. While it's cooling, your radiation therapists will tape the bag to your skin so it takes the shape of your upper body and arms. This takes about 15 minutes.

You will lie in this mold during your simulation and each of your treatments. This helps make sure you're in the correct position during each treatment.

Imaging

You will have imaging scans while you're in your treatment position. These may be done on a machine called a simulator or on a computed tomography (CT) scan machine. The scans will be used only to map your treatment area. They aren't used for diagnosis or to find tumors.

If you're having a CT scan, your nurse may place an intravenous (IV) line in one of your veins. The IV line will be used to give you contrast (dye) before the scan. This helps your team get clear images of the area to be treated.

You may need to hold your breath during the CT scan. Your radiation therapists will tell you how and when to do it.

During the scan(s), you will hear the machine turn on and

off. Even if the noise seems loud, your radiation therapists will be able to hear you if you talk to them.

The imaging scan(s) will take about 45 minutes.

Skin markings (tattoos)

While you're lying in your treatment position, your radiation therapists will draw on your skin with a felt marker. You can wash off the felt markings after your simulation.

You will also need permanent skin markings called tattoos. The tattoo marks are no bigger than the head of a pin. Your radiation therapists will use a sterile needle and a drop of ink to make each tattoo. Getting them will feel like a pinprick. **The tattoos are permanent and won't wash off.** If you're concerned about having tattoos as part of your radiation treatment, talk with your radiation oncologist.

You will get 5 to 7 tattoos in the area being treated. After the tattoos are made, your radiation therapists will take photographs of you in your treatment position. The photographs and tattoo marks will be used to position you correctly on the table each day of your treatment.

After your simulation

At the end of your simulation appointment, we will schedule an appointment for your set-up procedure. This is the final appointment before your treatment starts. You will also be assigned to a machine for your daily treatment.

Scheduling your treatment

Radiation treatments are given daily, Monday through Friday, for about _____ weeks.

You may have chemotherapy and radiation treatments on the same day. It's safe to get chemotherapy either before or after your radiation treatment.

You must come in every day that you're scheduled for treatment. Your radiation therapy may not work as well if you skip or miss treatments. If you need to miss a treatment for any reason, you must call your radiation oncologist's office to tell your team. If you need to change your schedule for any reason, speak with the scheduler or call your doctor's office.

Checking your treatment schedule

You can see your treatment schedule in your patient portal, MSK MyChart. If you do not have a MSK MyChart account, you can sign up at mskmychart.mskcc.org. You can also ask a member of your care team to send you an invitation.

It's very helpful to use MSK MyChart to keep track of your appointment times. We will call you if we need to reschedule any of your treatment appointments.

Planning your treatment

During the time between your simulation and your set-up procedure, your radiation oncologist will work with a team to plan your treatment. They will use the images taken during your simulation to plan the angles and shapes of your radiation beams. They will also determine the dose of radiation that you will receive. These details are carefully planned and checked. This takes between 5 days and 2 weeks.

Set-up procedure

Before your first treatment, you will have a set-up procedure. This procedure usually takes about 1 hour. If pain or anxiety medication was helpful during your simulation, you may want to take it before this procedure.

When you arrive for your set-up procedure, you will be shown to the dressing room and asked to change into a hospital gown.

Your radiation therapists will bring you to the room where you will receive your treatment each day. They will position you on the table. You will lie exactly as you did on the day

of your simulation.

Special x-rays called beam films will be taken to make sure that your position and the area being treated are correct. Beam films may also be taken before some of your other treatments. They aren't used to see how your tumor responds to the treatment.

Depending on your treatment plan, you may start treatment on the same day as your set-up procedure or 1 to 2 days later.

During your treatment

For each of your treatments, check in at the reception desk and have a seat in the waiting room. When your radiation therapists are ready for you, you will be shown to the dressing room and asked to change into a hospital gown. Keep your shoes on during your treatment.

Your radiation therapists will bring you into the treatment room. They will help you lie on the table. You will be positioned exactly how you were lying during your set-up procedure.

Once you're positioned correctly, your radiation therapists will leave the room, close the door, and start your treatment. You won't see or feel the radiation, but you may hear the machine as it moves around you and is turned on

and off. You will be in the treatment room for about 30 minutes, depending on your treatment plan. Most of this time will be spent putting you in the correct position. The actual treatment only takes a few minutes.

You will be alone in the room during your treatment, but your radiation therapists will be able to see you on a monitor and hear you through an intercom at all times. They will make sure you're comfortable during your treatment.

Breathe normally during your treatment, but don't move. However, if you're uncomfortable or need help, tell your radiation therapists. They can turn off the machine and come in to see you at any time, if needed.

Neither you nor your clothes will become radioactive during or after treatment. It's safe for you to be around other people.

Weekly visits during your treatment

Your radiation oncologist and nurse will see you each week to ask you about any side effects you're having, talk with you about your concerns, and answer your questions. This visit will be before or after your treatments each _____. You should plan to be at your appointment for about 1 extra hour on those days.

If you need to speak with your radiation oncologist or radiation nurse between these weekly visits, call your radiation oncologist's office. You can also ask the support staff or your radiation therapists to contact your radiation oncologist or nurse when you come in for treatment.

Vitamins and dietary supplements during radiation therapy

Vitamins, minerals, and herbal or botanical (plant-based) supplements are examples of dietary supplements.

It's OK to take a multivitamin during your radiation therapy. Do not take any other dietary supplements without talking with a member of your care team.

Side effects of treatment

You may have side effects from radiation therapy. The type and how severe they are depends on many things. These include the dose of radiation, the number of treatments, and your overall health. The side effects may be worse if you're also getting chemotherapy.

Below are the most common side effects of radiation therapy to the abdomen. You may have all, some, or none of these. Your nurse will talk with you about the side effects you're most likely to have.

Appetite loss

Your appetite may decrease while you're receiving treatment. However, your body needs protein and calories. They help repair the the normal cells injured from radiation. Also, if you use a mold during your treatments, it may not fit correctly if your weight changes. Try not to lose weight during your treatment.

- Be selective about what you eat to be sure you increase your calories and protein. We will give you the resource *Eating Well During Your Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eating-cancer-treatment). It contains many suggestions. Try the foods that are recommended.
- Try to eat small meals often throughout the day.
- If you never seem to feel hungry, set up a schedule to make sure you eat regularly. For example, set a schedule to eat every 2 hours.
- Eat your meals in a calm place. Take your time eating. Eat with family or friends whenever you can.
- Choose foods with different colors and textures to make your meals more appealing.
- Bring snacks and drinks to your treatment appointments. You can have while while you're waiting or while you're coming to and from your appointments.

- Drink liquid nutritional supplements if you're not eating enough food. There are many products available, and they come in many flavors. Ask your doctor or nurse which product is best for you.

Nausea or vomiting

Nausea is when your stomach is upset and you feel like you may vomit (throw up). You may have nausea, vomiting, or both during your treatment. This may happen as early as your first treatment.

If you have nausea or vomiting, tell your doctor or nurse. They can prescribe medication to help. Take the anti-nausea medication 1 hour before each treatment appointment. It may also help to change your diet while you're getting treatment.

Below are suggestions to help manage your nausea and make sure you're getting enough food and liquids.

- Eat a light meal before each treatment appointment.
- Drink only a small amount of liquids with your meals to keep from feeling too full or bloated.
- Sip liquids between your meals throughout the day. Using a straw may help. Try freezing your favorite drinks in ice cube trays and sucking on these during the day.
- Choose foods that won't cause nausea, such as:

    - Foods at room temperature or cooler
    - Liquids that are cooled or chilled
    - Dry, starchy foods such as toast, soda crackers, melba toast, dry cereal, pretzels, and angel food cake
    - Yogurt, sherbet, and clear liquids (such as apple juice, Jell-O®, and ginger ale)
    - Cold chicken or turkey, baked or broiled, with the skin removed
    - Soft fruits and vegetables
- Avoid foods and liquids that may make nausea worse, such as:
    - Hot foods with strong odors
    - Spicy, fatty, greasy, and fried foods
    - Very sweet foods
    - Acidic or citrus foods and juices (such as orange, grapefruit, pineapple, and tomato)
    - Alcohol
- If you feel nauseous, try eating small amounts of dry, starchy foods (such as the examples listed above). You can also try drinking ginger tea, as long as there aren't any sores in your mouth. If you start feeling better, try having small, frequent meals.

Pain or difficulty swallowing, heartburn, or upset stomach

If your esophagus is in the area being treated, you may have trouble swallowing or pain when you swallow. If your stomach is in the area being treated, you may have heartburn or an upset stomach. These side effects often start during your second or third week of treatment. They can last for up to 2 weeks after you finish treatment.

It's important to manage these side effects so you can eat, drink, and get enough nutrition during your treatment. You can take liquid supplements if you aren't eating enough food. There are many products available, and they come in a variety of flavors. Speak with your doctor or nurse about how to select the one that will be best for you. You can also ask to make an appointment with a dietitian if you need help with your diet.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you're having any of these side effects. They will give you medication to help. You can also follow the guidelines below.

If you're having pain or trouble swallowing:

- Avoid foods and drinks that may irritate your esophagus, such as:
  - Very hot foods and fluids
  - Dry, hard, and coarse foods (such as chips, pretzels,

and crackers)
    - Spices (such as pepper, chili, Tabasco® sauce, and curry)
    - Acidic or citrus foods and juices (such as orange, grapefruit, pineapple, and tomato)
    - Foods and drinks with caffeine (such as coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate)
    - Alcohol
    - Tobacco
- Take small bites of food and chew well before you swallow.
- Eat soft, moist, or puréed foods. These foods may be easier to swallow. You can also try adding sauces and gravies to foods.
- Eat and drink cold foods and liquids to help soothe your throat. Some people find that fruit nectars are particularly soothing.
- If you're having trouble swallowing pills, ask your doctor or nurse if the medication comes in liquid form. If not, many pills can be crushed and taken with a soft food such as applesauce. However, check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before doing this. Crushing some medicines affects how they work.

If you're having heartburn:

- Don't eat at bedtime. For most people, it's best to avoid eating anything for about 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Sit upright for at least 30 minutes after each meal. This helps keep your stomach juices from flowing back into your esophagus.

Diarrhea

You may notice changes in your bowel movements during your treatment. These may include having more bowel movements and softer stools than usual. You may also develop diarrhea. These side effects can start during the first few weeks of your treatment and last until 2 to 4 weeks after you finish treatment.

Below are guidelines to help you manage diarrhea and other changes in your bowel movements. Follow these guidelines until your bowel movements return to normal.

- Eat foods that are low in fiber, low in fat, and lactose-free. Your nurse will give you the resource . When your bowel movements return to your normal pattern, you can slowly start adding foods from your usual diet.
- Try to drink 2 to 3 quarts (8 to 12 cups) of liquids throughout the day. This will help replace the water and salts you lose in your bowel movements.

    - Choose drinks such as Gatorade®, juices, and nectars. It's best to dilute them (add a little bit of water) first so they're not too strong. Non-fat soup broth and Pedialyte® are also good choices.
    - Limit drinks with caffeine (such as coffee, tea, and colas), because they can make you more dehydrated.
- Eat bananas and potatoes without the skin. They help replace important salts you may lose when you have diarrhea.
- Avoid any food or drink that makes your symptoms worse.
- Take medication for diarrhea, such as loperamide (Imodium®). You can buy it a pharmacy without a prescription. Your doctor may prescribe other medications.

Skin and hair reactions

During radiation therapy, your skin and hair in the area being treated may change. This may happen both on your abdomen and on your back where the radiation exits your body. This is normal.

- After 2 to 3 weeks, your skin may become pink or tanned. Later in your treatment, your skin may become bright red or very dark.

- Your skin may feel dry, itchy, and look flaky.
- You may have a rash, especially in areas where your skin has been exposed to the sun. If this happens, tell your doctor or nurse. A rash can also be a sign of infection.
- Skin in sensitive areas may blister, open, and peel. If this happens, tell your doctor or nurse.
- You may lose some or all of the hair in the treatment area. The hair will usually grow back 3 to 6 months after you finish treatment.

Your skin will gradually heal after you finish treatment, but this often takes 3 to 4 weeks. Sometimes, skin reactions get worse during the week after you finish treatment. If this happens, call your doctor or nurse.

Your nurse will teach you how to care for your skin. They will apply special dressings (bandages) or creams, if needed. Your doctor may stop your treatment until your skin heals.

Follow the guidelines below to care for your skin. Keep following them until your skin gets better. **These guidelines refer only to the skin in the treatment area.**

Keep your skin clean

- Bathe or shower every day. Use warm water and a mild, unscented soap (such as Neutrogena®, Dove®, baby soap, Basis®, or Cetaphil®). Rinse your skin well and pat it dry with a soft towel.
- When washing, be gentle with the skin in the treatment area. Don't use a washcloth, scrubbing cloth, or brush.
- The tattoo marks you received before your treatment are permanent and won't wash off. You may get other markings during treatment, such as an outline of your treatment area with a felt-tipped marker. You can remove these markings with mineral oil when your radiation therapists say it's okay.
- **Don't use alcohol or alcohol pads on the skin in the treatment area.**

Moisturize your skin often

- Start using a moisturizer when you start treatment. This can help minimize skin reactions. You can use an over-the-counter (not prescription) moisturizer.
  - Use a moisturizer that doesn't have any fragrances or lanolin. Your nurse may suggest a moisturizer for you to use.
  - Don't use more than 1 moisturizer at a time, unless

your nurse tells you to use more.

- If you're using a moisturizer, apply it 2 times each day.

Avoid irritating your skin in the area being treated

- If your skin is itchy, don't scratch it. Apply moisturizer. Ask your nurse for recommendations on how to relieve the itching. They may give you a prescription for medication to treat itchy skin.
- Wear loose-fitting cotton clothing and undergarments over the treatment area. Avoid tight clothing that will rub against your skin.
- Use only the moisturizers, creams, or lotions that you have discussed with your radiation oncologist or nurse.
- Don't use makeup, perfume, powder, or aftershave on the skin in the treatment area.
- Don't shave in the treatment area. If you must shave, use only an electric razor. Stop if your skin becomes irritated.
- Don't put tape on the treatment area.
- Don't let the skin in the treatment area come into contact with extreme hot or cold temperatures. This includes hot tubs, water bottles, heating pads, and ice packs.
- If you don't have any skin reactions, you can swim in a

chlorinated pool. Shower right after you get out of the pool to rinse off the chlorine.

- Avoid tanning or burning your skin. If you're going to be in the sun:
  - Use a PABA-free sunblock with an SPF of 30 or higher.
  - Wear loose-fitting clothing that covers as much of the skin in the treatment area as possible.

Fatigue

Fatigue is feeling tired or weak, not wanting to do things, not being able to concentrate, or feeling slowed down. You may develop fatigue after 2 to 3 weeks of treatment, and it can range from mild to severe. Fatigue will gradually go away after your treatment is done, but it can last for several months.

There are many reasons you may develop fatigue during treatment, including:

- The effects of radiation on your body.
- Traveling to and from your treatments.
- Not having enough restful sleep at night.
- Not eating enough protein and calories.
- Having pain or other symptoms.
- Feeling anxious or depressed.

- Side effects of certain medications.

You may find that your fatigue is worse at certain times of the day. Below are suggestions to help you manage your fatigue.

Ways to manage fatigue

- If you're working and are feeling well, keep doing so. However, working less may help you have more energy.
- Plan your daily activities. Think about the things you need to do or that are most important to you. Do these activities when you have the most energy.
- Plan time to rest or take short (10 to 15 minute) naps during the day, especially when you feel more tired. When you nap, try to sleep for less than 1 hour at a time.
- Try to sleep for 8 or more hours every night. This may be more sleep than you needed before you started radiation therapy.
    - Being active during the day can help you sleep better at night. For example, if you're able to exercise, you can go for a walk, do yoga, or ride a bike.
    - Relaxing before you go to bed can also help you sleep better at night. For example, you can read a book, work on a jigsaw puzzle, listen to music, or do calming hobbies.

    - You may also find it helpful to go to sleep earlier at night and get up later in the morning.
- Ask family and friends to help you with things like shopping, cooking, and cleaning. Check with your insurance company to see if they cover home care services.
- You may have more energy if you exercise. Ask your doctor if you can do light exercise, such as walking, stretching, or yoga.
- Eat foods and drink liquids that are high in protein and calories. For information about eating during your treatment, read the resource *Eating Well During Your Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eating-cancer-treatment).
- Ask your radiation oncologist or nurse for help managing any other side effects you have. Pain, nausea, diarrhea, trouble sleeping, or feeling depressed or anxious can increase your fatigue.

Changes to your blood cell counts

Bone marrow is the substance inside your bones that makes blood cells. You have 3 kinds of blood cells:

- White blood cells that fight off infection.
- Platelets that help your blood to clot when you injure

yourself.

- Red blood cells that carry the oxygen you need for energy.

You may have lowered blood cell counts when large areas of bone marrow are in the area being treated. Chemotherapy can also impact your blood cell count.

We will keep track of your blood cell counts with a blood test called a complete blood count (CBC). If your counts drop, we may stop your treatment until the level increases. We will discuss this with you if it happens.

Sexual and reproductive health

You may have concerns about how cancer and your treatment can affect your sex life. You are not radioactive. You can't pass radiation to anyone else. It's safe to be in close contact with others.

You can be sexually active during your radiation therapy, unless your radiation oncologist gives you other instructions. If you or your partner are able to have children, you must use birth control (contraception) to prevent pregnancy during your radiation therapy.

Talking with your radiation oncologist or nurse about your sexual health can be hard, but it's an important conversation to have. They may not bring it up unless you

share your questions and concerns. You may feel uncomfortable, but most people in cancer treatment have similar questions. We work hard to make sure everyone in our care feels welcome.

Sexual health programs

MSK offers sexual health programs. These programs can help you manage the ways your cancer or cancer treatment affects your sexual health or fertility. Our specialists can help you address sexual health or fertility issues before, during, or after your radiation therapy.

- To learn about our Female Sexual Medicine & Women's Health Program or to make an appointment, call 646-888-5076.
- To learn about our Male Sexual & Reproductive Medicine Program or to make an appointment, call 646-888-6024.
- To learn about our Cancer and Fertility Program, talk with your healthcare provider.

Other sexual health resources

Read *Sex and Your Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/sex-cancer-treatment) to learn more about sexual health during cancer treatment.

The American Cancer Society also has information about

sexual health issues during cancer treatment. You can find it online at www.cancer.org/cancer/side-effects/sexual-side-effects or call 800-227-2345 to ask for printed information.

Emotional health

Cancer diagnosis and treatment can be very stressful and overwhelming. You may feel:

• Anxious or nervous • Afraid • Alone • Angry	• Depressed • Helpless • Frustrated	• Numb • Uncertain • Worried

You might also worry about telling your employer you have cancer or about paying your medical bills. You may worry about how your family relationships may change, or that the cancer will come back. You may worry about how cancer treatment will affect your body, or if you will still be sexually attractive.

It's normal and OK to worry about all these things. All these kinds of feelings are normal when you or someone you love has a serious illness. We're here to support you.

Ways to cope with your feelings

Talk with others. When people try to protect each other by hiding their feelings, they can feel very alone. Talking can help the people around you know what you're thinking. It might help to talk about your feelings with someone you trust. For example, you can talk with your spouse or partner, close friend, or family member. You can also talk with a chaplain (spiritual advisor), nurse, social worker, or psychologist.

Join a support group. Meeting other people with cancer will give you a chance to talk about your feelings and learn from others. You can learn how other people cope with their cancer and treatment and be reminded you're not alone.

We know that all cancer diagnoses and people with cancer are not the same. We offer support groups for people who share similar diagnoses or identities. For example, you can join a support group for people with breast cancer or for LGBTQ+ people with cancer. Visit www.msk.org/vp to learn about MSK's support groups. You can also talk with your radiation oncologist, nurse, or social worker.

Try relaxation and meditation. These kinds of activities can help you feel relaxed and calm. You might try thinking of yourself in a favorite place. While you do, breathe slowly.

Pay attention to each breath or listen to soothing music or sounds. For some people, praying is another way of meditation. Visit www.msk.org/meditations to find guided meditations lead by our Integrative Medicine and Wellness providers.

Exercise. Many people find that light movement, such as walking, biking, yoga, or water aerobics, helps them feel better. Talk with your healthcare provider about types of exercise you can do.

We all have our own way of dealing with tough situations. Often, we do what worked for us in the past. But sometimes that's not enough. We encourage you to talk with your doctor, nurse, or social worker about your concerns.

After your treatment

Be sure to keep your follow-up appointments with your radiation oncologist. During these appointments, your radiation oncologist will evaluate your response to treatment. You may have blood tests, x-rays, and scans during these visits.

Before each follow-up appointment, write down your questions and concerns. Bring this and a list of all your medications to your appointment. If you're running low on

any medication you need, tell your radiation oncologist before you run out. You can also call your radiation oncologist or nurse at any time if you have any questions or concerns.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your radiation oncologist or nurse if you have:

- A fever of 100.4 °F (38 °C)or higher.
- Chills.
- Discomfort in the treated area.
- Any new or unusual symptoms.

Contact information

If you have questions or concerns, contact a member of your radiation therapy team. You can reach them Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at these numbers.

Radiation oncologist: _____
Phone number: _____

Radiation nurse: _____
Phone number: _____

Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

Support services

MSK support services

Counseling Center
www.msk.org/counseling
646-888-0200
Many people find that counseling helps them. Our counseling center offers counseling for individuals, couples, families, and groups. We can also prescribe medicines to help if you feel anxious or depressed. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral or call the number

above to make an appointment.

Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service

www.msk.org/integrativemedicine

Our Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, including music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Call 646-449-1010 to schedule an appointment for these services.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service. They will work with you to come up with a plan for creating a healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. Call 646-608-8550 to make an appointment.

Nutrition Services

www.msk.org/nutrition

212-639-7312

Our Nutrition Service offers nutritional counseling with one of our clinical dietitian nutritionists. Your clinical dietitian nutritionist will talk with you about your eating habits. They can also give advice on what to eat during and after treatment. Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call the number above to make an appointment.

Rehabilitation Services

www.msk.org/rehabilitation

Cancers and cancer treatments can make your body feel weak, stiff, or tight. Some can cause lymphedema (swelling). Our physiatrists (rehabilitation medicine doctors), occupational therapists (OTs), and physical therapists (PTs) can help you get back to your usual activities.

- **Rehabilitation medicine doctors** diagnose and treat problems that affect how you move and do activities. They can design and help coordinate your rehabilitation therapy program, either at MSK or somewhere closer to home. call Rehabilitation Medicine (Physiatry) at 646-888-1929 to learn more.
- An **OT** can help if you're having trouble doing usual daily activities. For example, they can recommend tools to help make daily tasks easier. A **PT** can teach you exercises to help build strength and flexibility. Call Rehabilitation Therapy at 646-888-1900 to learn more.

Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) Program

646-888-8106

At MSK, care does not end after your treatment. The RLAC Program is for patients and their families who have finished treatment.

This program has many services. We offer seminars, workshops, support groups, and counseling on life after treatment. We can also help with insurance and employment issues.

Sexual Health Programs

Cancer and cancer treatments can affect your sexual health, fertility, or both. MSK's sexual health programs can help you before, during, or after your treatment.

- Our Female Sexual Medicine & Women's Health Program can help with sexual health problems such as premature menopause or fertility issues. Ask a member of your MSK care team for a referral or call 646-888-5076 to learn more.
- Our Male Sexual & Reproductive Medicine Program can help with sexual health problems such as erectile dysfunction (ED). Ask a member of your care team for a referral or call 646-888-6024 to learn more.

Tobacco Treatment Program

www.msk.org/tobacco
212-610-0507
MSK has specialists who can help you quit smoking. Visit our website or call the number above to learn more. You can also ask your nurse about the program.

Virtual Programs

www.msk.org/vp

Our Virtual Programs offer online education and support for patients and caregivers. These are live sessions where you can talk or just listen. You can learn about your diagnosis, what to expect during treatment, and how to prepare for your cancer care.

Sessions are private, free, and led by experts. Visit our website for more information about Virtual Programs or to register.

Radiation therapy support services

American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology

www.rtanswers.org

800-962-7876

This website has detailed information about treating cancer with radiation. It also has contact information for radiation oncologists in your area.

External support services

There are many other support services to help you before, during, and after your cancer treatment. Some offer support groups and information, while others can help with transportation, lodging (a place to stay), and treatment costs.

For a list of these support services, read *External Support*

Services (www.mskcc.org/pe/external-support-services). You can also talk with an MSK social worker by calling 212-639-7020.

Questions to ask your radiation oncologist

Before your appointment, it's helpful to write down questions you want to ask. Examples are listed below. Write down the answers during your appointment so you can review them later.

What kind of radiation therapy will I get?

How many radiation treatments will I get?

What side effects should I expect during my radiation therapy?

Will these side effects go away after I finish my radiation therapy?

What kind of late side effects should I expect after my radiation therapy?

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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