Radiation therapy to your pelvis can cause side effects to the area. These side effects vary from person to person. Most will last only a short time and will go away after your radiation treatments are done.

Side Effects
The most common side effects are:

• Skin reactions
• Diarrhea
• *Dysuria* (painful urination)
• *Proctitis* (painful rectum)
• Fatigue
• Bone marrow suppression (decreased blood counts)

Skin Reactions
You may have skin reactions while you are having radiation to your pelvis. These reactions occur because X-rays must pass through your skin to reach the tumor. Special care of the skin in the treatment area helps prevent or lessen skin reactions. (Ask for our handout “Skin Care During Radiation Therapy.”)

Follow these tips to lessen skin reactions:

• **Minimize moisture.** Use mild soap without perfumes or deodorants such as Neutrogena or Dove for Sensitive Skin. Avoid using lotions or perfumes or the treatment area.

• **Minimize chafing.** Wear clothes that are loose and soft. Avoid irritating materials, tight waistbands, or other tight clothing in the treatment area.

• **Avoid shaving.** The radiation will suppress hair growth in the treatment area.
Diarrhea

Radiation treatments to your pelvic area can irritate the lining of your intestines. This causes food to pass through your intestines without being fully digested and absorbed. This can cause cramps and diarrhea. These side effects usually occur around the 3rd or 4th week of treatment.

If you have diarrhea, tell your nurse and try these tips:

AVOID:

- Foods that are high in fiber such as beans, broccoli, corn, onions, garlic, popcorn, nuts, whole grains, and raw fruits and vegetables
- Foods that cause gas and cramps such as carbonated beverages chewing gum, beans, cabbage, nuts, and sweets
- Coffee
- High-fat foods, especially fried and greasy foods
- Milk or milk products if they irritate your bowels.

TRY:

- Small meals and snacks instead of large meals
- Plenty of fluid to stay hydrated such as Kool-aid, Popsicles, Jell-O, water, juice (not orange or grapefruit), or Gatorade.
- Only fruits and vegetables that are peeled and cooked
- Foods that are warm or at room temperature (very hot or very cold foods move through your intestines more quickly)
- Potassium-rich foods such as bananas, peach, or apricot nectar; potatoes, fish, and meat (your body loses potassium when you have diarrhea)

Tell your nurse if you have diarrhea. You may need an anti-diarrhea medicine.

Problems Urinating

Sometimes, radiation to the pelvic area causes frequency, urgency, or pain when urinating (dysuria).

- Tell your nurse or doctor if you have these symptoms. A urine sample will be tested to check for infection. Your doctor may prescribe antispasmodics or other medicines.
- Increase your fluid intake. Drink plenty of water, Gatorade, light fruit juices, or Kool-aid.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Ask your nurse or doctor if you have questions or concerns.

UWMC Cancer Center/ Radiation Oncology: Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., call 206-598-4000 and press 1.

After hours and on holidays and weekends, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Radiation Oncology resident on call to be paged.

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**Sore Rectum**

Your rectal area may get inflamed and irritated if this area is included in the treatment area. This is called *proctitis*.

If you get proctitis:

- Keep the area clean and dry. Use a hair dryer on the low setting to dry the area.
- Ask your doctor or nurse if sitz baths (soaking in warm water) or medicines might help.

**Bone Marrow Suppression**

Bone marrow produces red blood cells (which carry oxygen), white blood cells (which fight infection), and platelets (which help the blood clot). Adults make bone marrow in their large bones, such as the pelvis, large bones of the legs, sternum, or breastbone. Bone marrow is very sensitive to radiation. When bone marrow-producing bones are in the radiation area, your blood counts may be affected.

You will have blood draws during your radiation treatment to check your blood counts.

**Fatigue**

During radiation therapy, the body uses a lot of energy. Other things that add to fatigue are stress related to your illness, daily trips for treatment, and the effects of radiation on normal cells.

The amount of fatigue varies with each person and will likely go away over time when your radiation treatment is done. Pace your activities and plan to rest often so that you do not get too tired.

Ask someone to help you clean the house, shop, or cook meals. If someone offers to help, accept their help. If you live alone and are too tired to cook, try some of the well-balanced frozen dinners. Also consider using a community service such as Meals on Wheels.

**Nutrition**

It is important to eat a healthy diet to help your body heal. We encourage you to get enough protein and calories to maintain your weight. A dietitian is available to help you choose nutritious foods and help reduce symptoms you may have during radiation treatment.

**Other Side Effects**

Other less common side effects may also occur. Tell your doctor, nurse, or therapist if you have any other symptoms.