

# Combined Chemotherapy and Radiation for Patients with Anal Cancer

In the treatment called chemo-radiation, you will get both chemotherapy and radiation at the same time. Chemotherapy weakens the cancer cells which helps radiation to work better.

Your treatment team consists of your medical oncologist and your radiation oncologist. They work as a team to plan the best treatment approach with chemotherapy and radiation. You will be involved in your treatment planning decisions for chemotherapy and radiation.

## How is chemotherapy given?

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Chemotherapy is given into a vein (IV). You will get your chemotherapy slowly for several days. Chemotherapy may also be taken orally (by mouth). How you get your chemotherapy will be discussed with you by your doctor or nurse.

## What happens during radiation therapy?

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Before starting your radiation treatments, you will have an appointment called a simulation. During the simulation, the radiation oncologist plans how your radiation treatments will be done. The radiation treats your lower pelvis.

- The radiation only affects the area of your body that is being treated.
- You cannot feel or see the radiation.
- You will not be radioactive and will not expose anyone to radiation.

## What side effects can I expect?

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You will not feel radiation treatment when it is actually occurring, and you should not feel the chemotherapy while it is running. However, you may develop some side effects during or after your treatment.

The most common side effects are:

- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Burning when urinating
- Skin redness, blistering, or peeling

You may have mild or no side effects during the early part of treatment. Side effects get worse over time, and may be more noticeable during the second half of treatment.

Medications will be prescribed by your medical oncologist, radiation oncologist, or nurse practitioner that can relieve the symptoms of side effects. It is important to let your nurse or doctor know about any side effects you have as soon as they start.

## How should I care for my skin during radiation?

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Daily skin care:

- Wash your skin with a mild, fragrance-free, moisturizing soap. Gently pat the area dry.
- Use alcohol-free baby wipes to clean your anal area after each bowel movement.
- Your radiation nurse will recommend a moisturizing lotion and will discuss a schedule for when you should apply it.
- Tell your nurse if you develop a rash or dryness in the treatment area.

## How can I help myself during therapy?

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- Make an appointment to see a dietitian during the early part of your treatment. Our staff can help you contact the dietitian, or offer other help. Being able to eat and drink comfortably during treatment will make you feel better.
- Use an unscented, moisturizing soap when washing your skin in the area of your radiation treatment. Use a soft cloth and do not scrub. Please check with your radiation nurse before using any lotions on your skin. Tell your nurse if you develop a rash or dry skin in the area being treated.
- Light exercise, such as walking, will help you feel better during treatment and give you more energy.

## Let your nurse or doctor know right away if you have:

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- Soreness, redness, or leaking around the central line site
- Fever or shaking chills
- Burning when urinating

### Other problems to let us know about:

- Pain or discoloration in the pelvic area
- Trouble keeping food down
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Diarrhea
- Stomach discomfort or pain

## How often will I see my treatment team?

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You will see your medical oncologist or nurse practitioner once a week. You will also see your radiation oncologist and nurse weekly. Your radiation nurse is available to you whenever you need advice or have questions.

All of your providers work as a team. You are the most important member of this team. Please share any concerns, issues, or suggestions with us. Our goal is to provide the best care possible to help you successfully complete your treatment.

## Who do I call if I have problems at home?

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### Pump problems:

24-hour Helpline 1-800-315-3287

### Problems with side effects:

Infusion Unit: 617-724-2277

Primary Nurse in infusion

Radiation Oncology: 617-726-8650

Primary Nurse in Radiation Oncology



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