

# Combined Chemotherapy and Radiation for Patients with Rectal 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 can be given in one of two ways, either into a vein (IV) or taken orally (by mouth). If you take IV chemo, you will get your chemotherapy slowly for several days. Your treatment team will talk with you about the best way for you to get your chemotherapy.

## What happens during radiation therapy?

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Your radiation treatment plan is specifically designed for you. Before starting your actual 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 abdomen (stomach) and pelvis.

- The radiation only affects the area of your body 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 can develop side effects from the radiation or chemotherapy at any point during your treatment. You may have mild or no side effects during the early part of treatment. Side effects sometimes get worse over time. You may notice them more during the second half of treatment.

The most common side effects are:

- Nausea (upset stomach)
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Rash or dryness in the treatment area
- Cracking of the skin
- Redness on fingertips and feet

Talk to your treatment team right away if you have any symptoms or concerns about side effects.

### **How can I help myself during therapy?**

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- Make an appointment to see a dietician during the early part of your treatment. Our staff is happy to help you contact the dietician, or offer other help. Being able to eat and drink comfortably during treatment will make you feel better.
- Use an unscented, mild moisturizing soap when washing your skin. Be careful not to scrub.
- Light exercise, such as walking, will also help you feel better during treatment and give you more energy.
- Talk with your treatment team about any concerns you have.

### **Let your treatment team know right away if you have:**

- Trouble keeping food down
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Diarrhea
- Stomach discomfort or pain
- Soreness, redness, or leaking around the port site
- Rash or dryness in the treatment area

### **How often will I see my treatment team?**

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You will see your medical oncologist or nurse practitioner, your radiation oncologist, and radiation nurse once a week. During these appointments, we will draw your blood and check your weight, general health, and response to treatment. This is a good time to let us know about any concerns or problems that you have.

All of your health care 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

(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: \_\_\_\_\_

