

Prostate High Dose (HDR) Brachytherapy Treatment Package

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What is high dose rate (HDR) brachytherapy treatment?

- Brachytherapy (pronounced brack-ee-ther-a-pee) is a form of radiation treatment delivered from inside the body.
- You will be given medicine to put you to sleep for the treatment called anaesthesia.

How to Prepare for your Treatment

- If you are taking blood thinners, your radiation oncologist will tell you how many days before the brachytherapy treatment to stop taking them.
- Instructions for eating, drinking and taking medications before surgery will be given to you by the anesthesia team. It is important to follow these instructions closely.
- Your radiation oncologist will give you a prescription for Tamsulosin (or Flomax). You will need to start taking this 3 days before your brachytherapy procedure.
- You may have blood work and other tests done before your treatment.
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol for 24 hours before your treatment.
- You will need someone to drive you home from your appointment and stay with you that night.
- Do not drive for 24 hours after your procedure. This is due to the effects of the medication that put you to sleep.

Bowel Preparation

You MUST do a “bowel prep” to make sure that your bowel is empty for the treatment. The bowel prep uses a medication called PICO-SALAX®. You will need to buy this from your pharmacy. You do not need a prescription.

On the day before the brachytherapy treatment, take the PICO-SALAX® according to the package instructions. Take 1 packet at 8 a.m. and the second packet at 2 p.m. If you are from out of town and will be staying at a lodge, you will need to arrive in Halifax by noon. You can then take the PICO-SALAX® at noon and 6 p.m.

You will need to stay close to a toilet during the bowel prep, as you will have bowel movements several times. You need to drink lots of clear fluids (at least 2 litres) during the day.

You will need to bring a Fleet® enema with you to the Cancer Centre. Please arrive at the time given to you. A nurse will bring you into a private clinic room. You will be asked to take this immediately before the procedure.

Starting at 12:01 a.m. on the day before the brachytherapy treatment, you can drink only clear fluids. You are not allowed to eat any solid foods or drink any milk products.

| Clear Fluid Options: | Do not eat/drink: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Apple juice • Cranberry juice • Grape juice • Orange juice without pulp • Clear broth • Jell-O® • Popsicles • Coffee or tea (without milk) • Gatorade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any solid foods • Soup (except broth) • Milk or milk products • Juice with pulp |

Please follow the clear fluid list above. The anaesthesiologist may tell you to take medications with a small amount of water on the morning of the brachytherapy treatment. Please follow the directions of your Anaesthesiologist.

How is brachytherapy treatment delivered?

- The procedure will take about 3-4 hours.
- There will be several staff in the room.
- You will meet with an anaesthesiologist.
- You will lie down on a special table.
- An IV will be started in your arm. The IV will be used to give you the medicine and fluids you need during the procedure.
- You will be connected to a heart, blood pressure and oxygen monitor.
- Once you are asleep, your legs will be placed in stirrups for support.
- The treatment area will be cleaned with a cool, brown soap. A catheter (soft tube) will be put in your bladder to drain urine.
- The radiation oncologist will put needles into your prostate, through the skin between the scrotum and the anus (called the perineum).
- Pictures of your prostate will be taken using an ultrasound machine. These pictures will be used to plan your treatment.
- The radiation therapist will connect plastic tubes to the needles. The radiation source will move from a special machine through the tubes and into the needles to deliver the treatment.
- The treatment is given while you are asleep.
- After the treatment is finished, the needles will be taken out.
- You will be woken up and taken to the recovery room where the nurses will care for you.
- Your family can wait in the main waiting room of the Cancer Centre. You can go home once you are fully recovered. This will take about 2 hours.

Before you leave, you should know:

- You will likely have external radiation treatment starting in about 2 weeks.
- You will have a separate appointment for radiation markings (called your simulation markings appointment) to plan this part of your treatment.
- You may need prescriptions for medications to take after treatment.
- You must have a responsible adult to take you home and stay with you for 24 hours.
- Do not drive or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours.
- Do not drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Do not sign any legal documents or important papers for 24 hours.
- You should drink lots of fluids (like water) in the first few days after brachytherapy treatment.
- Avoid any heavy lifting or exercise for 1 week after brachytherapy treatment. If you are working, ask your radiation oncologist about when you can return to work.
- There will be no radiation left in your body after brachytherapy treatment. You will not be radioactive. You do not need to take any precautions around other people because of the radiation treatment you will receive.

What are the side effects of brachytherapy treatment?

Radiation affects normal and cancerous cells. When normal cells are damaged, side effects may happen.

Common side effects of brachytherapy treatment include:

1. Trouble with urinating (common)

- Passing urine more often, sometimes with a slower stream
- A burning feeling, or mild pain while urinating
- Trouble starting the stream of urine
- A feeling of not being able to empty your bladder fully
- Waking up at night to urinate (drinking less fluid after 6 p.m. can help)

If you are having trouble urinating, you can try stopping certain foods and drinks like:

- Coffee, tea, and other drinks with caffeine
- Pop or soda
- Spicy foods
- Alcohol
- Citrus foods (oranges, orange juice, grapefruit)

These symptoms get better over time. Your radiation oncologist will talk to you about continuing to use tamsulosin (or Flomax®) to help.

If you continue to have trouble urinating or cannot urinate at all, please contact your Radiation Oncology Team for further support and guidance.

If this is after hours, please go to your nearest Emergency Department. Occasionally, a catheter may be needed temporarily to help with urination. Usually this happens within the first 2 weeks after brachytherapy treatment.

For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet titled: [Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy: Cystitis](#)

2. Trouble with bowel movements

Your bowel movements may be more frequent, watery (diarrhea), and painful. Brachytherapy treatment can also cause constipation. You can take stool softeners or laxatives if constipation happens. Please talk to your radiation oncology team if you have any of these problems.

For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet titled: [Information for Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy: Diarrhea](#)

3. Fatigue (mild)

Levels of fatigue can vary from patient to patient. You may be more tired than normal after usual activity and may need a nap or rest to help with this.

For more information on how to manage this side effect, please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet titled: [Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue](#).

4. Erections

Brachytherapy treatment can cause erectile dysfunction (problems getting or keeping erections). Please talk about this with your radiation oncologist. Medications can help with this problem. It is a good idea to treat problems with erections as soon as you notice them. Early treatment makes it more likely that you will keep having erections in the future.

5. Sexual Activity

There is usually no reason to stop being sexually active during brachytherapy treatment. You may engage in sexual activity as soon as you feel comfortable. Some patients have pain or discomfort with ejaculation for the first few weeks after treatment. You may notice changes in your semen including the amount, colour, or blood in semen. There is no risk of passing radiation to your partner.

6. Fertility

Brachytherapy treatment may affect your fertility. Sperm banking may be an option and needs to be talked about before radiation begins if this is important for you.

7. Infection

Infection of the bladder or prostate can happen after brachytherapy treatment. If you have a fever or chills after brachytherapy treatment, you should notify your radiation oncology team right away, or go to your nearest emergency department.

8. Bleeding or bruising

You may have a small amount of bleeding in the skin where the needles were placed. Ice packs can help with this. It is common to have bruising in this area and in the scrotum. This will go away on its own.

Long term effects (months or years after treatment)

Problems related to brachytherapy treatment can happen a long time after treatment is finished. This can include bleeding from the bowel or bladder. These problems are NOT common. If they occur, you should notify your radiation oncology team right away, or go to your nearest emergency department.

Do I need to have external radiation too?

Your radiation oncologist will talk to you about whether you need to have external radiation treatments. If external radiation treatment is recommended, this usually starts about 2 weeks after brachytherapy treatment. Treatment will be scheduled every weekday for 3 to 4 weeks (no holidays). You will be given another info package explaining this in more detail.

How will I know if the treatment worked?

Your radiation oncologist will ask you to get your blood work checked over time.

They will be watching your PSA (prostate specific antigen) level. This is the best way of telling how the treatments worked. The PSA level should come close to zero over time. It can take a few years for this to happen.

Sometimes the PSA can start rising after treatment before falling on its own. This is called a “PSA bounce”. Though this may worry you, no treatment is needed, it does not mean the cancer has come back.

Throughout this resource there are links to other helpful documents that will give you more information about specific topics. Please visit <https://www.nshealth.ca/cancer-care-program> to view our patient education library.

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here:

<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources>

Find our cancer patient videos here: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/cancereducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.