

Vulvar Cancer

This information will help prepare you and your caregiver for your treatment. Vulvar cancer is a cancer that occurs on the outer surface of the female genitals known as the vulva.

What to Expect

You will receive external beam radiation therapy, a noninvasive treatment. You may also receive weekly chemotherapy to increase the effect of radiation.

Side Effects

You may develop side effects 2-3 weeks after starting radiation therapy.

- Fatigue is common during treatment
- Skin irritation/sensitivity, redness, swelling, blistering, and peeling (like a sunburn)
- Pain from skin breakdown which can be severe
- Skin sores or infection
- Nausea/vomiting
- Bladder and bowel problems, such as:
 - Dysuria (burning with urination)
 - Difficulty urinating
 - Frequent bowel movements
 - Diarrhea
 - Blood in your stool
 - Vaginal discharge
 - Narrowing of the vagina
- Swelling (lymphedema) from lymph nodes or lymph vessels

- Low blood counts
- Sexual changes, including pain with sex or bleeding after sex due to vaginal changes
- Stop having periods (premature menopause) due to ovary damage
- Can no longer get pregnant (infertility) due to ovary damage

Please discuss problems or concerns about side effects or any part of your treatment with your doctor, nurse, or therapist while on treatment.

Skin Care

Bathe and shower using a mild unscented soap, such as Dove[®], Ivory, or Cetaphil[®].

- **DO NOT** use a washcloth, scrubbing cloth, or brush when showering
- No bathing; use a shower or hand shower if possible
- Pat skin dry with a soft towel or allow to air dry
- **DO NOT** use moisturizers within 4 hours before your radiation treatment
- Try rinsing off with a handheld shower after every bowel movement to avoid skin irritation from excessive wiping
- Avoid extreme temperatures to the area being treated (hot tubs, heating pads, ice pack, etc.)
- Avoid tanning or burning your skin during and after treatment
- A daily vitamin is OK during your treatment. **DO NOT** take other vitamins or any supplements, including both nutritional and herbal supplements, without talking to your doctor

Care for Skin Breakdown

- Once moist breakdown (sloughing off) occurs, start using Domeboro[®] soaks (*review handout provided*)
- You will need to start antifungal pills orally by week 2
- If skin breakdown is very painful, you will need analgesics (pain medication), lidocaine gel, or sitz baths
- You may also need Silvadene[®] cream, which your doctor will prescribe

Caution

- Report any skin changes to your doctor, nurse, or therapist
- Heating pads and/or very hot water can cause pain or skin irritation to the treatment area
- Hot tubs or saunas should be avoided while receiving radiation as well as 6 weeks after treatment
- **DO NOT** use products with alcohol, including alcohol pads, on your skin in the areas being treated
- **DO NOT** use makeup, perfumes, or powders in the area being treated

Contact your medical team immediately if you have:

- More than 5 loose watery stools in a 24-hour period
- Unusual bleeding
- Temperature of 100.5°F or above
- Chills

Contact Us

For any questions or concerns, please reach out to the Radiation Oncology clinic at 214-645-8525. For non-urgent concerns, you can utilize MyChart.