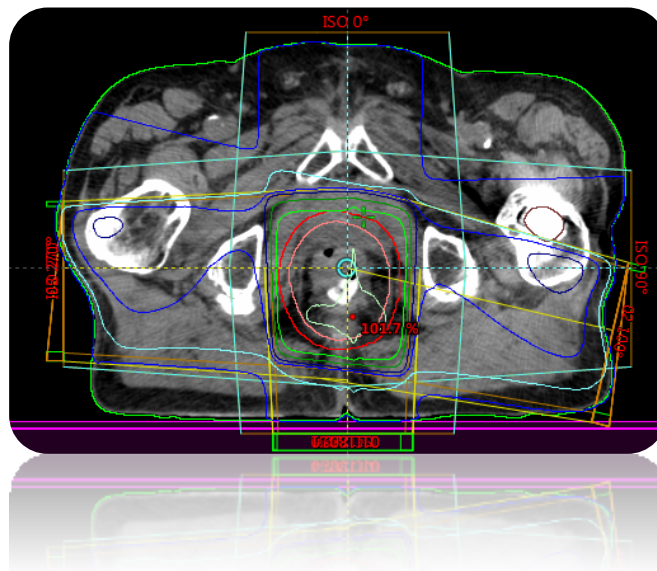


Radiotherapy to the pelvic area for cancer of the anus or rectum



Treatment

Each treatment session lasts for about 10 to 20 minutes. The actual radiation only lasts for one to five minutes. You will receive treatment every day, except weekends and public holidays. During the treatment period, the staff will use the treatment machine to take a special type of x-ray images. These images are not used to evaluate the effect of the treatment, but they are an important quality control to ensure that the treatment remains on target.

In order to achieve a consistency in bladder filling at each treatment session, you should empty your bladder approximately one hour before your scheduled treatment. Immediately following urination, you should drink two glasses (300 ml) of water and avoid any further visits to the toilet until the treatment session has been completed.

Follow-up during treatment

During the course of treatment, you will be required to take blood samples at regular intervals. You will also be scheduled for doctor's appointments in the outpatient's clinic (Kreft Poliklinikk). During your appointments with the doctor, you can address any questions you may have regarding your illness and the treatment. If you need prescriptions or a sick leave certificate, please request this during your doctor's appointment. It can be useful to make a list of questions for the doctor prior to the appointment.

Smoking

The effect of radiotherapy depends on the access to oxygen in the tissue. Smoking limits oxygenation of the tumour tissue, and may thus lead to inferior treatment effect. Continuing smoking during radiotherapy is also associated with more side effects from the treatment. It is therefore important that you abstain from smoking. If you need further information or advice on smoking and radiotherapy, we recommend that you address this issue with your doctor or a radiotherapist.

Side effects from radiotherapy

Radiotherapy can cause side effects. Acute side effects often become apparent one to two weeks into the treatment and will generally subside a few weeks after completion of the radiotherapy.

Common acute side effects are:

FATIGUE

Radiotherapy can make you feel faint and tired. Get plenty of rest and fresh air during treatment, and go for walks outside when possible. Adapted physical activity may be beneficial.

A balanced and nutritious diet is important. During radiotherapy you should also drink plenty of fluids. Your body needs from 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid every day. If you are in an employment situation, you should be able to work as usual if you feel up to it.

SKIN REACTIONS

There is a possibility that the surface of your skin will become irritated. Signs of redness, tenderness or itching are not to be ignored. During the treatment period we recommend that you wash the radiated area with a mild, non-perfumed soap. Avoid taking baths, and use the shower instead. Do not rub radiated skin, but gently pat the skin dry with a soft towel and let it air dry if possible.

Avoid clothes that are tight-fitting, and try to use soft cotton clothes. Your skin must be clean and as dry as possible. Radiated skin should be exposed to air, but protected from the sun.

DIARRHOEA

Radiation of the pelvic area can cause loose stools or diarrhoea. If this should affect you, please consult a radiotherapist who can advise you on how to adjust your diet and/or medications. Abdominal pains can occur up to several weeks after completion of the treatment. The mucous membranes inside the rectum can be affected by the radiation. This may lead to itching and discomfort.

URINARY FREQUENCY

The mucous membrane in the bladder will be affected by the radiation. This can cause symptoms similar to those of a urinary tract infection, such as a burning sensation and a frequent need to urinate. Talk to the radiotherapy staff if this becomes a problem.

FOR WOMEN

Certain treatment programmes directed at the pelvic area may cause adhesion of connective tissue in the vagina. This can be counteracted through the use of a vaginal dilator after completion of the radiotherapy.

If you experience side effects or have other questions related to your treatment, you are always welcome to ask the radiotherapy staff. You can also address these issues with your doctor during your scheduled appointments.

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