

Caring for Your Child
Managing Side Effects of Radiation Treatment

The side effects of radiation treatment depend on the areas of the body being treated. The radiation oncologist will review the side effects that are expected for your child during your first visit. If you have any questions about these side effects, please ask your radiation oncology team at the Perelman Center.

Skin Irritation

Your child's skin in the treatment area may look red, irritated, sunburned, or tanned. After a few weeks, the skin may become dry. On days that you are scheduled for treatment, it is important to let the radiation oncology team know about any skin changes. They can teach you how to relieve any problems.

Most skin reactions go away a few weeks after treatment is finished.
For some children, the skin in the treatment area stays darker than it was before.

It is important to treat your child's skin that is exposed to radiation gently:

- Do not use any lotions or creams on the skin for 4 hours before radiation treatment.
- Use only lukewarm water and mild soap. Let water run over the treatment area. Do not rub. Your child should not wear tight clothing over the treatment area.
- Try not to rub, scrub, or scratch any sensitive spots.
- Avoid putting anything that is hot or cold, such as heating pads or ice packs, on the treated skin.
- Do not use powders, creams, perfumes, deodorants, body oils, ointments, scented lotions, or home remedies on the treatment area. Please continue to follow these guidelines during treatment and for several weeks after treatment is over. Some products can irritate the skin and may interfere with the radiation treatment. Your radiation oncology team may provide more detailed instructions about these products. Only use lotions (such as aquaphor) and soaps that have been recommended by your radiation oncology team.
- Keep your child out of the sun during treatment and for at least 1 year after treatment. If your child will be in the sun for more than a few minutes, he should wear protective clothing. Ask your radiation oncology team about using sunscreen lotions.

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Low Blood Counts

Depending on the area of the body being treated, your child's blood counts may be affected. Radiation may lower your child's white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets.

When blood counts are low, there may be a risk for infection, anemia, or bleeding. If the radiation is expected to affect blood counts, we will teach you what to look for and what to do. Your child will have blood tests often. You can find more information about low blood counts in your Oncology Family Handbook.

Nausea and Diet

If your child's stomach feels upset before radiation treatment, it may be helpful for him to eat a bland snack such as toast or crackers. This can help prevent nausea or soothe an upset stomach. If your child is having anesthesia, please remember to follow the eating and drinking instructions from your child's anesthesia team.

Some children may feel sick to their stomach (nausea) for a few hours right after radiation treatment. If your child has this problem, it may be helpful for him to stop eating for several hours before treatment. Sometimes it is better to receive treatment on an empty stomach. After treatment, it may help to wait 1 to 2 hours before eating again.

There are medicines that can prevent or reduce nausea during radiation treatment. Ask your radiation oncology team if this is an option for your child. If your child takes nausea medicine, be sure that he takes the medicine as prescribed. If your child has general anesthesia for his radiation treatments, the anesthesia team may also give him anti-nausea medicine.

Here are some other tips to help an upset stomach or nausea:

- Give your child small meals.
- Avoid foods that are fried or high in fat.
- Provide cool liquids between meals.
- Serve foods that have a mild smell.
- Serve foods cool or at room temperature.
- For a very upset stomach, serve clear liquids (broth and juices) or bland foods that are easy to digest, such as dry toast and Jell-O.
- Follow any diet your doctor or Registered Dietitian gives you. Talk to your CHOP Registered Dietitian for more ideas on managing nausea.

Coping with Radiation Treatment

Helping your child through radiation treatment can be extremely stressful. Many parents are worried or afraid as they take their child to treatment. As treatment begins, both you and your child will adjust to the routine. It may be difficult to juggle all your other responsibilities, including work, other children, and family duties. The caregiver role is one that can leave people feeling depressed if they don't get enough support. It is important to get help from family and friends to manage all the added tasks you may have. The radiation oncology social worker can also provide support and assistance with these concerns.

When should I call my Radiation Oncology Team at the Perelman Center?

Call your radiation oncology team if your child has any of the following radiation-related problems or concerns:

- Repeated episodes of diarrhea or watery stools in 24 hours
- Repeated episodes of nausea and vomiting in 24 hours
- Mouth sores
- Sore throat
- Skin irritation

Penn/CHOP Radiation Phone Numbers:

- CHOP Pediatric Reception: 215-615-5678
- CHOP PACU Nurses' Station: 215-615-5691
- PENN Nurses' Station: 215-615-5604 (after 3pm)

When should I call my Oncology Healthcare Team at CHOP?

You can also call your oncology healthcare team at CHOP if you are concerned about any symptoms your child may have or if your child seems ill.

Always call if your child has a fever!

- Fever of 101.3 degrees F (38.5 degrees C) once, or
- Fever of 100.4 degrees F (38 degrees C) three times in a 24 hour period, taken at least 2 hours apart

CHOP Oncology Phone Numbers:

- 8:30am-5pm, 7 days a week (including holidays):
 - Call the Oncology Phone Nurse at **215-590-2299**.
- After 5pm,
 - Call the Main Hospital at **215-590-1000** and ask for the Oncology Fellow on call.

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