

Treating prostate cancer with high-dose-rate brachytherapy



You'll soon be starting high-dose-rate brachytherapy to treat your prostate cancer. Here's what you need to know about the treatment and what to expect.

What is brachytherapy?

Brachytherapy is a form of radiation therapy that sends a radioactive source to your prostate to destroy the cancer cells. Your treatment will deliver a high dose of radioactivity to your prostate for about 20 minutes. This is what we call high-dose-rate or HDR brachytherapy.

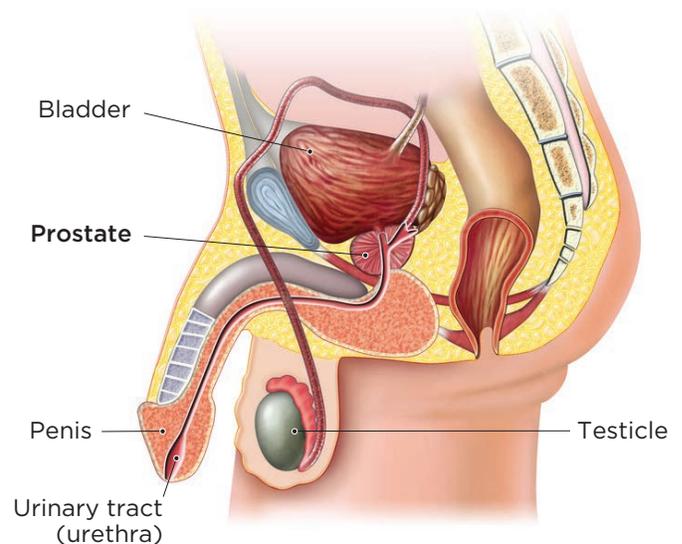
There is also another form of brachytherapy called low-dose-rate, which delivers a very low dose, but in permanent form.

Why would I receive one treatment rather than the other?

There are several ways to treat prostate cancer. Your doctor will suggest different treatments depending on the extent of your cancer, among other factors. Your doctor will also discuss the side effects with you. Together, you will choose the most appropriate treatment, based on the advantages and disadvantages that matter most to you.

Remember that your body will NOT be radioactive either during or after your treatment.

Prostate and nearby organs



How long will the treatment take?

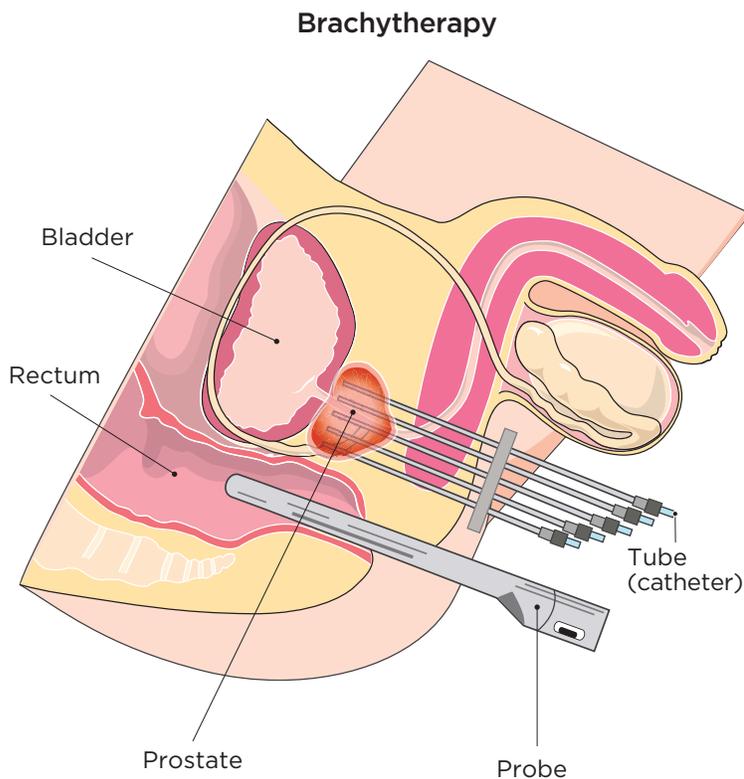
You'll be spending about 2 hours in the treatment room.

Normally, you'll leave the hospital in the evening. Make sure you have someone with you, because you won't be able to drive.

How is radiation therapy administered to the prostate?

With HDR brachytherapy, radiation is sent directly to the area of the tumour through tubes inserted directly in the prostate.

This is different from external radiation therapy, which uses a device outside the body to send radiation to the tumour. In that case, the rays need to go through the skin and sometimes travel through healthy organs. Brachytherapy is less likely to affect adjacent organs.



The tubes are inserted directly in the prostate to administer the treatment.

How should I prepare BEFORE the treatment?

Several weeks before the treatment

You may be asked to come in to the preoperative clinic. You would then have various tests to complete your health profile.

One week ahead, start taking the medication your doctor prescribed to help you urinate.

The night before the treatment

Give yourself a rectal enema at home, as explained to you.



After midnight, you should be fasting. Take nothing to drink or eat.

If you have to take medication, you can have a little water to wash it down, unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

The day of the treatment, bring to the hospital

- All the medications you usually take, in their original containers.
- A loose pair of underwear and some form of absorbent protection - either an adult diaper or a small towel to be placed in your pants.

How will the treatment proceed?

- > This procedure is performed while you're "asleep" (under general anesthesia). You will feel no pain during the procedure and you will not move, which is extremely important. You may be offered a sedative beforehand.
- > A urinary catheter will be installed. This is a tube that enters through the penis so you can urinate.



- > The doctor will introduce plastic tubes (catheters) into the skin, between the scrotum and the anus. The tubes will then be inserted through the body cavities to the prostate.
- > The medical team will make sure that the tubes are properly in place, using a probe (see diagram on page 2).
- > The tubes will be attached to a treatment device that sends a radioactive source (Iridium 192). The treatment will take 20 to 30 minutes.
- > Then the tubes will be removed.
- > You'll be taken to the recovery room.
- > Generally, the urinary catheter will be removed before you leave the hospital. If not, that will be done the next day.

Could I feel some discomfort after the treatment?

- > A bruise may appear on your testicles or penis right after the treatment or a few days later. This is normal and generally not very painful.
- > Don't worry if you see blood in your urine a few hours or a few days after the treatment. This is normal. Make sure you drink plenty of water (1 to 2 litres a day) to prevent the formation of blood clots in the bladder.
- > For the first month after your treatment, you may feel the need to urinate more often. You may also feel a slight burning while urinating. If this happens to you, tell your doctor. There is medication that can help you.

- > Having a bowel movement may hurt a little if your anus is irritated. Some people also have bloody stools or diarrhea. These effects, which are rarer, disappear about 5 weeks after the treatment. They may come back from time to time, even months later. Tell your doctor if these side effects continue.



IMPORTANT

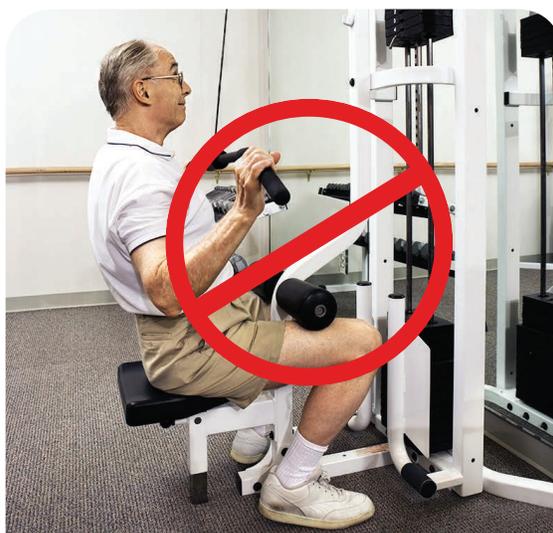
If you're unable to urinate, call your clinical contact in the radiation oncology department. If it's after hours, call 9-1-1 for emergency assistance or go to the emergency room at the hospital.

Could there be long-term consequences?

The major risk related to this treatment is impotence. Three or four of every 10 men who have the procedure are unable to have an erection 5 years later. There is also a slight risk of inflammation of the bladder and the rectum. Talk to your doctor.

What precautions should I take AFTER the treatment?

Once you're back home, avoid anything that involves strenuous efforts for a week or two. That means no cycling, working out at the gym or moving boxes!



When will I go back to see my doctor?

This can vary from patient to patient. Normally, brachytherapy is performed before external radiation therapy treatments. In that case, you'll see your doctor a few days after the brachytherapy procedure. At that appointment, the doctor will also plan the external radiation therapy treatments that are usually offered. You will have imaging tests the same day. The staff will tell you what preparations to make.

Once all your radiation therapy treatments are completed, you'll see your doctor every 4 months and then every 6 months for at least 5 years.

Who should I notify if I can't come to my appointment?

If you must cancel an appointment, please call the radiation oncology department as early as possible:

Tel.:

Who should I ask for help or answers to my questions?

If you have questions or concerns:

- on weekdays, call the radiation oncology department and ask to speak to your radiation oncologist
- in the evening or on weekends, call the hospital and ask to speak to the radiation oncologist on call



USEFUL RESOURCES

Ask for a copy of the CHUM information sheet on support services for prostate cancer patients and their families.

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available (in French only). Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site chumontreal.qc.ca/votresante



NOTEPAD



Questions



Resource people and contacts

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal chumontreal.qc.ca

