The side effects from radiation therapy to the pelvis can include problems with the bladder, sexual or reproductive function, and stomach and digestive tract.

**Bladder Issues**
Your therapy may irritate your bladder. This can cause frequent urination during the day or night, and pain or burning with passing urine. Drinking fluids can help ease these side effects. Drink about 8 cups of fluid each day, unless your doctor instructs you otherwise. Water is a good choice. Try to limit or avoid these:

- caffeine drinks like coffee, tea, cola or chocolate drinks
- carbonated water or sodas
- alcohol
- citrus fruits or juices like orange or grapefruit
- spicy foods

**Sexual and Function**
Radiation therapy to the pelvis can affect the sexual functioning. It may also affect fertility during treatment and after, depending on the dose.

**For Men**
- Decrease desire – Some men produce less testosterone after pelvic radiation. This may decrease the desire for sex.
- Erection – Radiation can damage the blood vessels to the penis. This can slow erections or make them less firm.

For Women
- Hot flashes – The ovaries may stop working from radiation therapy to the pelvis. If you have already reached menopause, you may not notice any changes. If you have not reached menopause, you may have hot flashes. The length of time they last varies.
- Vaginal dryness - The lining of the vagina can become tender during treatment. This can cause light bleeding during intercourse. Scarring can also occur. The vagina may not stretch as much during intercourse, causing pain. A dilator can often help to stretch the vagina. Talk to your doctor about this and guidelines for intercourse during radiation treatment.

**Stomach and Digestive Problems**
Problems with your digestive tract resulting from radiation therapy to the pelvis can include diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Your doctor may prescribe medication to relieve these problems. Do not take any medicines or home remedies without first checking with your doctor.

Besides medication, there are things you can change with your eating and nutrition to manage these side effects and feel better.
**Diarrhea**

To have fewer problems with diarrhea, try to:

- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Avoid foods that are high in fiber, such as raw fruits and vegetables and whole grains. These can cause gas and cramping.
- Avoid spicy, fatty, or fried foods. Alcohol and products with caffeine such as coffee, tea, or chocolate can also cause diarrhea to worsen.
- Stay away from milk and milk products if you find they increase your diarrhea.
- Avoid sugar alcohols such as xylitol and sorbitol (found in sugarless gums and candies).
- Get plenty of rest. Try to decrease your stress by relaxing. Listen to some calming music or work on a hobby that you like.
- Talk to your dietitian if you use a supplement such as Ensure® or Boost® and your diarrhea worsens.

If your diarrhea gets worse:

Tell your nurse or dietitian. Try a clear liquid diet for a day. Your body will lose a lot of water with diarrhea so you need to drink at least 8 cups of fluid each day. Clear liquids include:

- Bouillon or clear, fat-free broth
- Clear carbonated drinks
- Fruit-flavored drinks or punch
- Fruit ices without fruit pieces or milk
- Plain flavored gelatin
- Popsicles
- Sports drinks
- Strained citrus juice or lemonade/limeade
- Tea
- Water

When the diarrhea starts to improve:

- Start on a BRAT (bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast) diet.
- Eat these in small amounts.
- If your stools start to firm up again, add other foods such as mashed potatoes.
- Slowly add other foods to your diet to see how your bowels react.
- Talk to your nurse or dietitian if your do not improve in a few days.

**Skin Care with Diarrhea**

The skin around your rectum may become sore. Keep it clean and dry. Ask your doctor or nurse to suggest a protective ointment or gel you might use to help prevent soreness. You may want to soak in a warm tub of water or a sitz bath to ease rectal soreness.

Be sure to wash your hands well after each stool. If you notice that you have any of the following, call your doctor or nurse right away:

- Chills, vomiting, or fainting
- Very strong thirst
- Fever of 101°F or greater
- Pain in your stomach with the diarrhea that is not eased by passing of stool or gas
- Stools with blood
- Feeling more weak or tired
Nausea and Vomiting
If you find you are feeling queasy for a few hours after radiation therapy, you may be able to tolerate the therapy better on an empty stomach. Do not eat for 1 to 2 hours before your treatment. You may also want to wait 1 to 2 hours after your therapy before eating.

If the nausea and vomiting persist, ask your doctor for some medicine to prevent it. Take the medicine when your doctor suggests, even if you feel it is sometimes not needed.

You may also want to try to unwind since tension or worries may add to your stomach upset. Taking slow deep breaths may help you relax. It also can be helpful to think about being in a place you find peaceful. Picture the ocean or mountains or a favorite room in your home.

If you are spending time in a waiting room before your treatment, you may want to read, work on a crossword puzzle, or listen to music on headphones.

Some Tips to Help an Upset Stomach
- Follow any special diet your doctor, nurse or dietitian gives you.
- Eat small meals and snacks.
- Eat more often.
- Drink and eat slowly.
- Avoid fried or other high fat foods.
- Drink cool liquids between meals.
- Avoid foods that are hot, spicy or have a strong odor.
- Eat foods that can be served cool or at room temperature.

If your stomach is very upset, try mild juices and broth or bland foods like toast, crackers and gelatin.

Talk with your doctor, nurse or therapist about any questions or concerns.