



Urinary and Bladder Changes

What they are:

Radiation therapy can cause urinary and bladder problems, which can include:

- Burning or pain when you begin to urinate or after you empty your bladder
- Trouble starting to urinate
- Trouble emptying your bladder
- Frequent, urgent need to urinate
- Cystitis, a swelling ([inflammation](#)) in your urinary tract
- [Incontinence](#), when you cannot control the flow of urine from your bladder, especially when coughing or sneezing
- Frequent need to get up during sleep to urinate
- Blood in your urine
- Bladder spasms, which are like painful muscle cramps

Why they occur:

Urinary and bladder problems may occur when people get radiation therapy to the pelvis (primarily prostate or bladder). Radiation therapy can harm the healthy cells of the bladder wall and urinary tract, which can cause inflammation, ulcers, and infection.

How long they last

Urinary and bladder problems often start 3 to 5 weeks after radiation therapy begins. Most problems go away 2 to 8 weeks after treatment is over.

Ways to manage

- **Drink a lot of fluids.** Usually 6-8 cups of fluids (1-2 liters) each day is recommended. Drink enough to keep your urine clear to light yellow. If you are waking up at night to urinate, minimize fluid intake in the evenings (after 6pm).
- **Avoid coffee, black tea, alcohol, spices, and all tobacco products.**
- **You can try over the counter medications to help with burning:**
 - Pyridium (AZO) 100 mg, take 1-2 tablets up to 3 times per day. THIS MEDICATION MAKES YOUR URINE TURN ORANGE OR RED IN COLOR. MAKE SURE THAT YOU GIVE THE URINE SAMPLE TO THE LAB BEFORE YOU START THIS MEDICATION.
 - Ibuprofen 200 mg, take 1-2 tablets every 4 hours as needed for pain.
- **Your doctor may prescribe medications to relieve symptoms.** Take these as directed and report your progress to the doctor.
- **Your physician may decide to obtain a urine sample to make sure there is no infection causing the burning.** Most likely, it is radiation rather than infection causing the burning, but if there is an infection it is important we treat it.



- **Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have incontinence (dribbling/leaking/inability to hold urine).** He or she may refer you to a physical therapist who will assess your problem. The therapist can give you exercises to improve bladder control.