

Vaginal Vault Brachytherapy

For patients with endometrial cancer

This booklet will give you information about:

- What vaginal vault brachytherapy is
- How to get ready for your vaginal vault brachytherapy
- What to expect on the day of your vaginal vault brachytherapy
- What to expect after your vaginal vault brachytherapy
- When to contact your health care team
- How to contact your health care team



Your health care team will go over this booklet with you.

**Keep track of your treatment
and appointment dates:**



Brachytherapy treatment dates and times:

Please contact your health care team if you have any questions or concerns about your vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment:

Important phone numbers

Monday to Friday 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM

- Call the Odette Cancer Centre at 416-480-5000. Ask to speak to a gynecology nurse.

After hours on weekdays 4:30 PM – 8:30 AM and on weekends and statutory holidays (24 hours a day)

- Call the After-Hours Telephone Line at 1-877-681-3057. Let them know you are having vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment.



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What is vaginal vault brachytherapy?

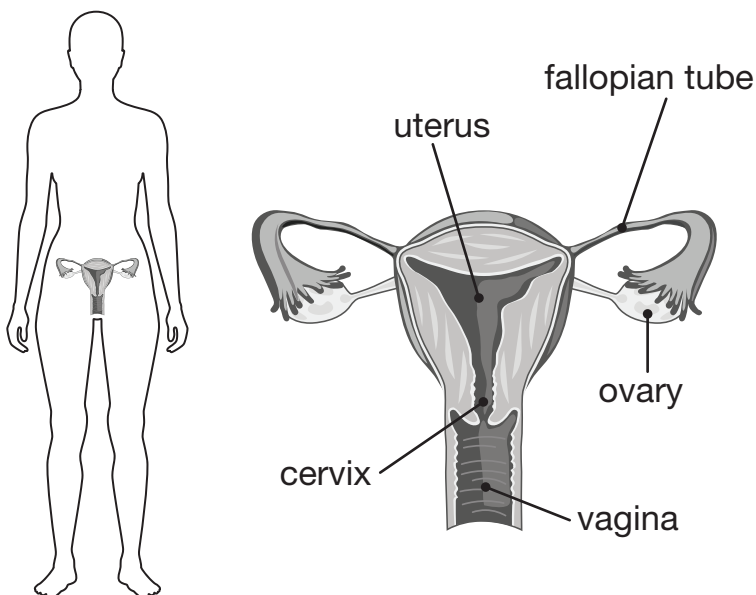


Vaginal vault brachytherapy is a type of internal radiation treatment. It is used after surgery for endometrial cancer to reduce the chances of the cancer coming back (recurrence).

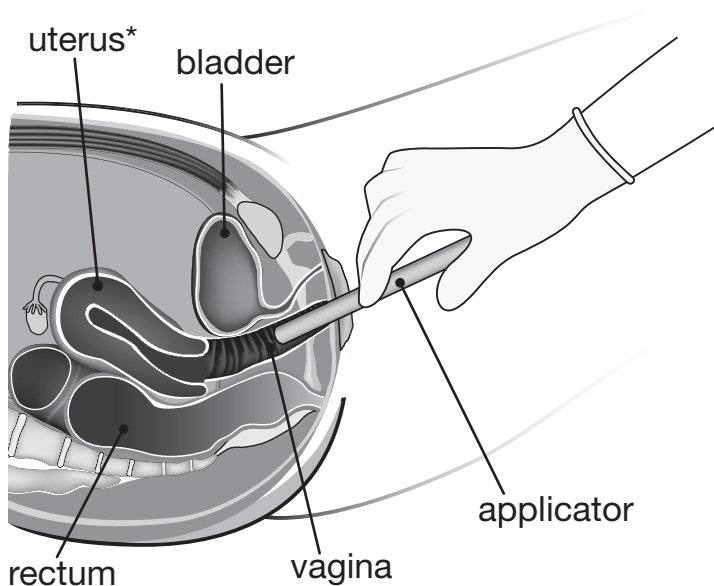
A small applicator that has a radioactive source is put into the vagina for a short period of time. The applicator delivers radiation to treat the vaginal vault (top of the vagina). Brachytherapy allows a large amount of radiation to target where the cancer was. This means that other healthy parts of the body do not get radiation.

Your health care team will let you know how many treatments you will need.

Most patients only having vaginal vault brachytherapy will need 3 treatments, 1 week apart. Most patients also having external beam radiation will need 2 treatments, 1 week apart.



The female reproductive system.



This is a side view of how vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment is done. An applicator is put into the vagina. Radiation is given through the applicator.

*some patients may not have a uterus

How can I get ready for my vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment?



To help you get ready for your treatment, make sure you:

- Eat breakfast before you come to the Odette Cancer Centre.
- Take your regular medication(s) (drugs).
- Bring this booklet with you.
- Bring your identification (ID) that shows your name, address and date of birth (Ontario Health Card and red Sunnybrook hospital card).

What can I expect on the day of my vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment?



1 Checking in:

- You will get your vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment in the Brachytherapy Suite at the Odette Cancer Centre. Please **check-in at the Radiation Therapy Reception desk on the Ground Floor** of the Odette Cancer Centre.
- You will wait in the waiting area until a nurse comes to get you. The nurse will bring you to a change room.
- You will be asked to take off your clothes from the waist down. You will be given a hospital gown to change into.
- The nurse will bring you into a room to talk about your treatment. Let them know about any questions or concerns you have.
- The nurse will take you to the Brachytherapy Suite. This is where your treatment will be given from the radiation therapists.

2 Getting ready to insert the applicator:

- You will be asked to lie flat on your back on the treatment bed. A member of your health care team will give you a flannel blanket to keep you warm.
- Your legs will be put in the stirrups. Your legs will be raised slightly. You will be in this position until the treatment is done (about 10 to 20 minutes).
- At your first treatment, the doctor will insert a speculum into your vagina. This will help your doctor see your vagina and decide what size of applicator you will need for your treatment.
- The applicator will be put into your vagina. You may feel some pressure.
- You will have an x-ray done when the applicator is in place. The x-ray will help your health care team make a treatment plan that is right for you.

3 Your treatment is given:

- Your health care team will leave the room when your treatment is ready to start. You will be in the treatment room by yourself. Your health care team will be in a room nearby watching you on a monitor. Your health care team will be able to see and hear you.
- It is important to stay still during your treatment. You should not feel any pain while you are getting treatment. You may hear 'clicking' or 'humming' noises.
- It usually takes about 5 to 10 minutes for your treatment to be given.
- When your treatment is done, your health care team will come back into the room and take out the applicator.

4 Getting ready to go home:

- The nurse will take you to the change room. You will put your clothes back on and can go home.
- **You will not be radioactive outside of the Brachytherapy Suite.**



You can watch a video to learn more about what to expect on the day of your brachytherapy treatment at sunnybrook.ca/cancer/videos (click on Radiation -> Vaginal vault brachytherapy).

What can I expect after my vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment?



You may have some side effects from your vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment. It is important to know what side effects to look for and what you can do to manage. Side effects from radiation can last for up to 4 to 6 weeks after your treatments are finished.

Common side effects include:

- Fatigue
- Vaginal soreness

Other less common side effects include:

- Urinary frequency and burning
- Vaginal bleeding and discharge
- Diarrhea

Call your health care team right away if:

- **You have bleeding from the vagina that is heavier than a light menstrual period or is bright red**
- **You need to change a saturated pad every 1-2 hours**

If you cannot reach your health care team, go to your closest emergency room.



If you are also having external beam radiation, your side effects may be more intense. Please talk to your radiation therapist if you have any questions or concerns about side effects from external beam radiation.



Fatigue

You may have fatigue after your treatment. You may feel worn-out, weak or heavy.

Here are things you can do to help with your fatigue:

Exercise

- Exercise can improve your energy and make your fatigue better.
- Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days. If it is too hard to do 30 minutes all at once, try to exercise for 5 to 10 minutes a couple of times a day.
- Start slowly. You can begin with light to moderate exercise such as walking, swimming or yoga.

Pace yourself

- Try to spread out activities that you need to do throughout the day. Take breaks when you start to feel tired. Sit when you can.
- Do activities or tasks that are most important to you first.
- Use aids such as a cane or walker to save energy. Avoid lifting heavy items.
- Ask friends and family to help with your activities.

Sleep

- Getting a good night's sleep can help to give you more energy.
- Take short naps (less than 1 hour) during the day.
- Try to limit alcohol and caffeine in the afternoon and evening.

Manage your stress and emotions

- Things such as depression, anxiety and stress can make it hard to sleep.
- Try activities that can help reduce your stress such as mindfulness, deep breathing and relaxation exercises, or yoga.
- Try to talk to someone such as a friend, family member, or your health care team about how you are feeling.

Try to focus on your diet

- Eating healthy foods can help give you more energy.
- Try to eat small meals and snacks during the day.
- Cook meals when you have the most energy.

If you would like more information about fatigue, go to cancercareontario.ca/symptom-management (type “fatigue” in the search bar).



Vaginal soreness

Vaginal vault brachytherapy treatment may cause your vagina to narrow and shorten. You may have some soreness or discomfort in your vaginal area after your treatment.

Here are things you can do to help with vaginal soreness:

- **Avoid sexual intercourse (sex) once you have started your brachytherapy treatment.** You can have sexual intercourse (sex) 2 weeks after your radiation treatments are done if you have no pain or bleeding from your vagina.
- **You can use a vaginal dilator 2 weeks after your radiation treatment is finished.** A vaginal dilator is a firm tube with a round end that can help open the vagina. If you want to have sex, using a dilator can help you enjoy sex and make it less painful.

Please ask your health care team for a copy of the “How to Use a Vaginal Dilator” booklet.



Urinary frequency and burning

You may need to urinate (pee) more after your treatment. You may feel burning when you urinate (pee).

To help with frequency and burning, try to drink lots of water (about 8 glasses a day).



Vaginal bleeding and discharge

You may have some slight spotting (bleeding) from your vagina. You may notice pink discharge (fluid leaking) from your vagina after your treatment. This should stop about 2 to 3 days after your treatment.

Here are things you can do to help with bleeding or discharge:

- You can use a sanitary pad.
- **Do not wear a tampon.** Wearing a tampon may irritate your vagina.

Call your health care team right away if:

- **You have bleeding from the vagina that is heavier than a light menstrual period or is bright red**
- **You need to change a saturated pad every 1-2 hours**

If you cannot reach your health care team, go to your closest emergency room.



Diarrhea

You may have diarrhea (loose or watery stool) after your treatment.

Here are things you can do to help with diarrhea:

- Talk to a Registered Dietitian to get nutrition advice on foods that you can eat.
- Contact your health care team for advice on medications (drugs) you can take such as Imodium®.

Your follow-up appointment



You will be given a follow-up appointment with your oncologist. Your follow-up appointment will be a couple of months after your last brachytherapy treatment. Your health care team will let you know when this will be.

At the Odette Cancer Centre, the Patient & Family Support Program offers free services to help you before, during and after your treatment as part of your care.

We have free services to help you manage eating, stress, worry, financial concerns, changes in health, and daily activities.



Visit the Patient & Family Support office, T-Wing, Ground Floor (TG 230) across from the radiation waiting area or call 416-480-4623.

How can I contact my health care team?



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