Radiation Therapy – Sitz bath

We recommend sitz baths to ease the discomfort and irritation of radiation proctitis (inflammation of the lining of the rectum). Sitz baths should be done three to four times a day if possible.

You may take your sitz bath in the bathtub or in a special sitz bath pan that fits into your toilet. What is most important is that you use enough water to cover the entire rectal area with three to four inches of water.

Use warm water. Do not make it too hot or you will burn your irritated tissues. You should sit in the water for at least 10 minutes each time or until it gets uncomfortably cold. You may add baking soda to the water, or you can just use plain water – it is your choice.

Dry the skin carefully afterwards with a soft towel. After that, air dry the skin between the creases. Do this with an electric fan or a hand-held hair dryer set on COOL. Pull the skin folds apart and blow air on the skin for 10 to 15 minutes.

Additional things you can do to help with rectal irritation from diarrhea or proctitis:

• Keep the skin as clean as possible. You may use baby wipes, Tucks pads or a sitz bath after every bowel movement to keep the skin clean.

• Keep the skin as dry as possible. If you are at home, wear loose-fitting house dresses or boxer shorts, preferably without any other underwear. Avoid nylon underpants, pantyhose or tight-fitting pants, as these retain both heat and moisture.

• Do not put any creams or ointments on the skin, unless specifically instructed. Itching and burning can be soothed at any time with a sitz bath or using a Tucks pad as a compress.

• Control diarrhea if you have it. Anti-diarrheal medicines will NOT help if you are having frequent, small formed stools but watery diarrhea will burn already irritated skin. Ask if you need advice.