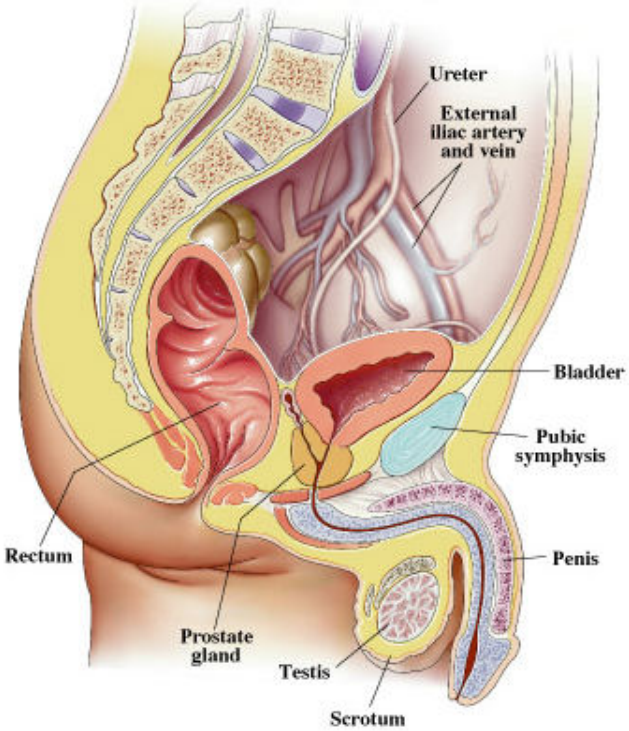
Brachytherapy for Prostate Cancer

Brachytherapy for prostate cancer is radiation treatment. It uses ultrasound to guide the insertion of tiny radioactive seeds into the prostate. This allows additional radiation to be given to the tumor, and less to the surrounding normal tissues. The seeds are about the thickness of a pencil lead and just over 1/8 inch long. Brachytherapy is associated with fewer side effects than external beam radiation therapy alone. Usually, there is a delay of about 2 months after the seed implants before external radiation is begun.



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If the tumor has spread outside the prostate, brachytherapy may still be used. This allows for a lesser course of external radiation. If your prostate is too large, you may be given medicines for about 3 to 6 months to shrink it. These will block the making of testosterone (*male sex hormone*). After treatment, the size of the tumor is rechecked by ultrasound. Usually, the tumor shrinks along with the rest of the prostate.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

Your caregiver will do a series of tests to see if you are a good candidate for the procedure. He/she will also discuss your choices, and help you decide what is best for you.

If you are a good candidate, the procedure is performed under a general or spinal anesthetic in a specially equipped room. It is done by a radiation therapist (*specialist in cancer treatment*) and a urologist (*specialist in treatment of urinary disorders*). The team uses ultrasound to guide long, thin metal tubes into the prostate gland. These are used to place the seeds. Following this, the rods are removed.

It takes about 1 hour to place the seeds. You will have a catheter in your bladder, following the procedure. This ensures that your urine does not get cut off, if the prostate swells. The catheter will be removed later, in your urologist's office. The radiation coming from the seeds is low, but you should avoid being around children and pregnant women. The radiation decreases over time and becomes inactive. The seeds can be left in place permanently.

Later, X-rays and CT scans will show the location of the seeds. A specialist can calculate the exact amount of radiation received.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

- You can expect a little blood in the urine for a couple days.
- Your urine stream may be weaker for a couple weeks, because of prostate swelling.
- All treatments for prostate cancer carry some risk of erectile dysfunction (*impotence*). The risk is lower for brachytherapy than for other treatments, such as surgery, but it does happen.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- You have difficulty or are unable to pass your urine.
- You have burning with urination or develop cloudy urine.
- You develop any problems that seem to be getting worse.

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