

# What You Need to Know About Tandem and Ovoid Implants for Cervical Cancer



The information in this pamphlet is for patients,  
family members and caregivers.



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

CANCER CENTER

Cover art detail from *Illuminations August Morning*

**Teresa M. McCue**

*“My images are a celebration of the spirituality of nature.  
They invite the viewer to step into my vision and perhaps find the  
beauty of their own world.”*

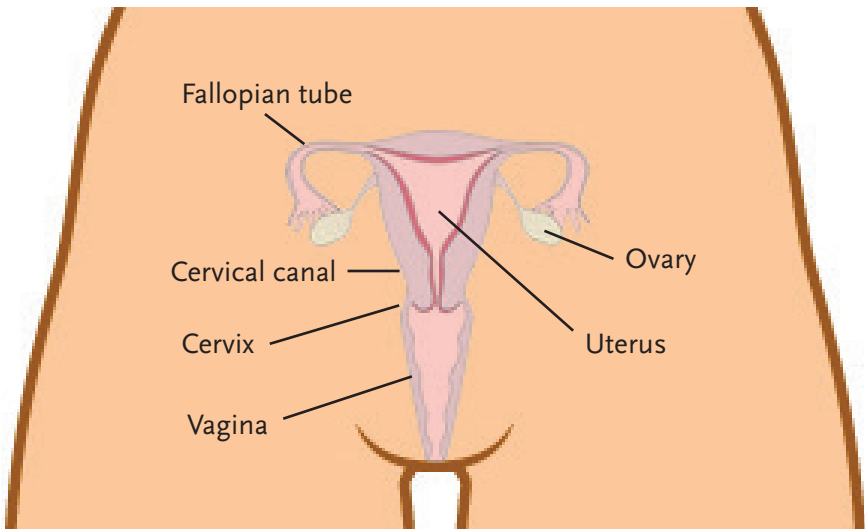
## What You Need to Know about Tandem and Ovoid Implants for Cervical Cancer

---

This pamphlet gives you information about your internal radiation or brachytherapy (pronounced “Brake-ee therapy”) high dose rate implant. This procedure is also called tandem and ovoid implants. The tandem implants are the small, metal tubes placed inside your uterus. The ovoid implants are applications placed on the side of the cervix.

Internal radiation is a temporary radiation implant that is removed before you leave the hospital. It gives a concentrated dose of radiation into or near the tumor. This means that a very high dose of therapy is given exactly where you need it, so other parts of the body are not harmed.

Below is a diagram of the female reproductive system. These pictures and definitions will help show where and how the radiation is delivered.



## Definitions:

---

**Cervical canal** – the opening passage from the uterus to the vagina

**Cervix** – the opening of the uterus

**Ovary** – the female reproductive organ where eggs are made

**Uterus** – a hollow, pear-shaped female reproductive organ located between the bladder and the rectum

**Vagina** – canal extending from the uterus and cervix to an opening in the female genital area

**Fallopian tube** – transfers eggs from ovary to uterus

## Before the Procedure:

---

- You will be scheduled to meet with an anesthesiologist. This is the doctor who puts you to sleep in the operating room.
- Bring a list of your medications and allergies to this appointment.
- You may have routine blood work and a chest x-ray or electrocardiogram (EKG).
- Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before the procedure.

## The Morning of the Procedure:

---

Please remember, you must have an adult come with you who will take you home after the procedure.

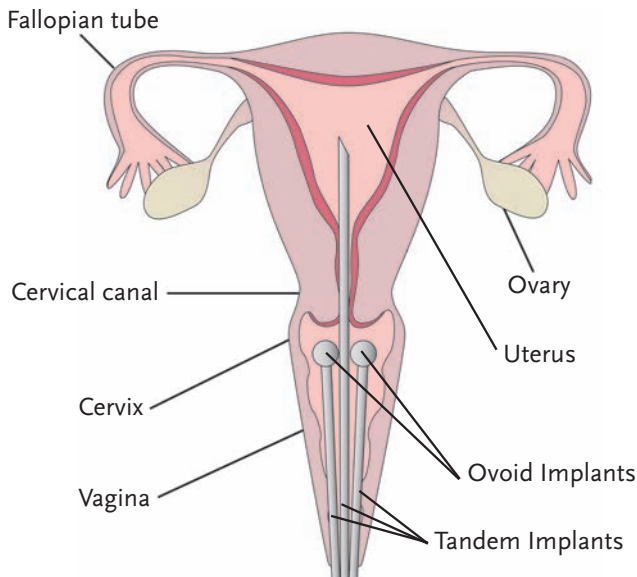
- Check in at the Center for Perioperative Care on the third floor of the Wang ACC.
- We will tell you what time you will have your procedure. Please arrive two hours before your scheduled time.

- Do not bring any valuables with you.
- You will change into a hospital gown.
- Give your clothes to the person who has come with you. He/ she will bring them to the Radiation Oncology area for you.
- Plan on being at Mass General for the whole day.

## During the Procedure:

---

- The anesthesiologist will give you medication to make you fall asleep.
- A small catheter, or tube, will be placed in your bladder and a different catheter put in your rectum.
- You will have an intravenous (IV) line inserted.
- The doctor will place three hollow metal tubes into your vagina and uterus. The tubes are held in place by packing so they will not move. The end of the tubes will reach outside your vagina so the radiation can be inserted for your treatment. One stitch will be placed to keep the tubes in place.



## After the Procedure:

---

- After the applicator is in place, you will be brought to the recovery room. You will stay there until you are awake.
- You will feel pressure caused by the packing and may have cramps, like menstrual cramps. You may also feel pain and discomfort in your lower back.
- You will be given pain medicine through a pump called a patient controlled analgesia pump (PCA). You will be shown how to use the PCA to help control your pain.
- When you are awake, you will be brought to the Radiation Oncology Department in the Cox Lower Level by stretcher.
- You will have a series of CT scans to check the placement of the applicator. This will take about 30 minutes.
- The doctor and physicist will do calculations and plan your treatment. During this time, you will remain on the stretcher. You will be lying on your back with your legs slightly apart. We place cushions under your knees to make you more comfortable. The person who has come with you may keep you company during this time.

## Treatment:

---

- When the treatment plan is complete, you will be brought to a room. Three small cables connected to the treatment machine will be attached to the end of the applicators. The doctor, nurse, and radiation therapist will leave the room.
- The radiation treatment takes about 6-15 minutes. During the treatment, you can be seen and heard at all times.
- Radiation treatment will be given once a week for 3-5 weeks.

## After the Treatment:

---

- When the treatment is completed, the cables are disconnected and the tubes are removed. You will not be radioactive. You will not be dangerous to your family or friends.
- The catheters, IV line and PCA pump will all be removed. Nothing will be left in your body.
- You will be able to go home with the person who has come with you.

## Normal Side Effects of Treatment:

---

You may have:

- Pink discharge or a small amount of bleeding from your vagina for the first 24 hours.
- Discomfort or a burning feeling when you urinate. It is important to drink more water, at least four extra cups a day.
- Cramps similar to menstrual cramps.

**Call 911 in case of an emergency. If you have a question or concern about your treatment, a doctor is on call 24 hours a day. Please call: Radiation Oncology at (617) 726-8650.**

## When to Call the Doctor:

---

If you have any of the following problems, call your Radiation Doctor:

- Bright red blood from the vagina or rectum.
- Unable to urinate 8 hours after the catheter is removed.
- Upset stomach or vomiting.
- Severe abdominal pain.
- Temperature above 101°.

## Sex:

---

You can have sex when you feel that you are ready, both physically and emotionally.

- If sex is painful three weeks after the procedure, tell your doctor.
- You will receive a vaginal dilator with instructions on your last treatment day.
- Some patients may be embarrassed to talk about sexual problems or concerns. We are understanding and will not tell anyone about your questions. Please do not be afraid to discuss this subject with your doctor or nurse.
- Ask your nurse for the sexual health sheet with tips on improving sex and intimacy (closeness) with your partner.



## **Mass General Support Services:**

---

**The Mass General Oncology Sexual Health Clinic (Yawkey 9E)** team can help to create a treatment plan that fits your needs and situation. Call 617-724-4800.

**Social workers** help patients and their families with many concerns from daily problems to life's most difficult situations. This is done through counseling, active problem solving, and using hospital and community resources. An **Oncology Resource Specialist** is available to give you information about:

- Community transportation options if you need assistance getting to your appointments
- Temporary lodging for patients who require local housing during their course of treatment

Social workers are members of your treatment team. They are available to you at anytime. All social work services are free of charge and no referral is necessary. Ask your treatment team for the name and number of your oncology team social worker.

**The Katherine A. Gallagher Integrative Therapies Program** offers wellness services and free workshops for patients with cancer and their loved ones. Through a wide range of services, you can learn tips for coping with symptoms and stress. These programs are designed to enhance quality of life and help manage a broad range of physical and emotional symptoms. A calendar listing the workshops and services are available throughout the Cancer Center and at [massgeneral.org/cancer/supportservices](http://massgeneral.org/cancer/supportservices).

Some of these services may be available in your treatment area. Please stop at the front desk to ask.







MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

---

CANCER CENTER

Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center  
55 Fruit Street  
Boston, MA 02114  
877.726.5130  
[massgeneral.org/cancer](http://massgeneral.org/cancer)

PESC 1.15

© The General Hospital Corporation, d/b/a  
Massachusetts General Hospital, 2015, all rights reserved.