

Radiation to the Brain

What you need to know

As it works to rid your body of cancer cells, radiation therapy can cause side effects in the treated area. Most side effects begin after two or three weeks of treatment. Report any side effects you experience to your radiation oncology team. This card provides information about how to minimize and treat side effects.

Neurological Effects

Radiation therapy to the brain can cause side effects. The following are symptoms of these side effects and what you can do to make you feel better:

- Please report the following symptoms to the radiation oncology staff: dizziness, lightheadedness, loss of balance, weakness in your arms or legs, difficulty with speech, changes in your vision, nausea, vomiting, headaches that don't go away with Tylenol, numbness or loss of feeling.
- You may be prescribed a medication called Decadron (Dexamethasone). It's important that you take this as prescribed. This medication is taken to reduce side effects of radiation. If you're vomiting or unable to take the medication, notify your radiation oncologist immediately. You should take an acid-reducing medication such as Prilosec or Prevacid at bedtime as long as you're taking Decadron.

Skin Reaction

Your skin may become irritated in the area where the treatments are given. Below are some measures you can take to care for your skin. You will lose the hair on your head from the treatments. Hair loss usually occurs after the third week of treatment. Usually, your hair will grow back slowly, starting within a few months after your treatment is completed.

Here's how to care for your skin in the treated area:

- Use non-deodorant, non-oiled, mild soap such as Ivory, unscented Dove or Basis. Gently cleanse (don't scrub) the treatment area and pat dry.
- Shampoo your hair with a mild, non-medicated shampoo.
- Wear a hat, wig or scarf to cover your head to protect against sun or cold.
- Apply the cream recommended by your radiation nurse or physician to the skin around your ears and forehead once a day initially. If your skin becomes dry or irritated, you may use the cream two to four times per day. Don't apply the cream within four hours before your treatment.
- You'll be sensitive to sunburn in the treated area, so don't expose that skin to the sun. After you've completed your treatment and your skin has healed, you may expose it to sun, but use a sunblock of SPF 30 or higher and reapply it frequently. Your skin may be sensitive to sunburn in the treated area for up to a year after radiation is completed.

- Skin irritation can start as a pinkness, tanning or rash on the skin and can progress to red, hot, dry, itchy or peeling skin.
- Don't use harsh chemicals on your hair such as hair dye.
- Don't use heat sources such as a curling iron or hot dryer settings.

Fatigue

During the last few weeks of your treatment, you may experience some generalized fatigue. It should not interfere with your normal activities, although you may feel more tired than usual and need additional rest. Try these strategies to fight fatigue:

- Balance activity with rest. If you feel tired, take a brief nap, if possible, or put your feet up briefly, then resume your activity.
- Drink six to eight, eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated beverages each day.
- Stay active. Walking is a non-stressful activity that may help fatigue.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is important. Try to eat three balanced meals each day. Don't try to diet or lose weight during treatment and don't skip meals. If you lose weight, a nurse will discuss your diet with you. If you need guidance about what makes a balanced meal, please discuss this with a nurse.

You may take a multivitamin but do not take vitamin E or vitamin C tablets.

Important Note: While you're undergoing radiation therapy, pregnancy is not advised. If you're not sure if you're pregnant or think you might be, please report this to your radiation therapy physician immediately.

Questions? Ask Us.

Remember: Report any side effects to the Radiation Oncology staff.

If you have concerns or questions, please ask them during your treatment appointment. If you need to speak with someone urgently, please call:

- Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Radiation Oncology Center at 314-251-6844
- After hours, to reach a physician call 314-663-3011



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