



Information For Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy to the Brain Area

Loss of appetite

Loss of appetite, you may notice that you are eating less than normal, or you have lost weight. These side effects described above can make eating and drinking difficult. Food and drink often lose or change their taste and texture, and become unappetising. However, it is important to try and remain well nourished, so try the following suggestions:

- + Eat small meals at regular intervals
- + Try out different foods
- + Concentrate on the smell of the food rather than the taste.

When the course of treatment is complete your appetite will gradually return to normal, though this may take several months.

After Treatment:

Radiation therapy is a cumulative treatment so the reactions may persist for several weeks following completion of your treatment. The reactions are usually most severe in the 1-2 weeks after the treatment finishes. You should continue to follow advice until these side effects have subsided.

On your final day of treatment you will be given an appointment to see the doctor in approximately 6-8 weeks. At this appointment the doctor will discuss your progress.

We are here to help, if you would like more information on any aspect of your treatment, or you are troubled by anything, please speak to us.

Contact Telephone Numbers:

Radiation Therapy Reception: 021-4922492

LA 1: 021-4922479

LA 2: 021-4922478

LA 3: 021-4921307

LA 4: 021-4921308

This leaflet aims to provide information for patients receiving a course of radiation therapy to the brain area. Your doctor may have already talked to you about this treatment but please ask if anything is still worrying you, however small you think it is. Each course of treatment is tailored to the individual, so your treatment plan may not be the same as somebody else's.

Before Treatment:

Before radiation therapy begins you may have a specially fitted mask made for your treatment. This device helps to keep your head in the same position and allows marks to be drawn on it. There will not be any marks drawn on your skin. The mask also helps the radiation therapists to locate the exact treatment area. If the mask is too tight please let the radiation therapists know as it can be removed and adjusted. Please see the leaflet on *The Mould Room*, which tells you more about this process.



Radiation Therapy to the Brain Area

Daily Procedure:

- + The radiation therapists will position you on the treatment couch using the marks drawn on your mask. It is important to lie still as possible and try not to help them if they are moving you.
- + Once you are correctly positioned try not to move and breathe as normal.
- + During treatment the radiation therapists will leave the room but they will watch you on monitors and they can hear you on an intercom so if you have any problems just raise your hand.
- + You will not feel anything, but you will hear the machine switch on. The machine will move around you but will not touch you.
- + If you feel concerned at any time whilst the mask is on, try to remain calm and breath normally. Raise a hand to indicate you have a problem and the radiation therapist will come into the room immediately and resolve the difficulty.
- + It is essential that you do not move until you are told the treatment has been completed by a radiation therapist.

Review Clinics:

A member of your consultant's medical team will see you once weekly. However we can arrange for you to see a doctor at any stage during your treatment should you need to.

You will have blood taken twice during your course of treatment, once during the first week, and again towards the end of the treatment.

Side Effects:

Radiation therapy is painless. However there are some side effects which are associated with radiation therapy and you may notice one or more of them gradually developing over the course of the treatment. Please note that it is rare for one patient to experience all of these side effects. Please remember to always let the doctor know if you develop any new symptoms either during or after radiation therapy treatment.

Early on you may find that you experience similar symptoms to those, which you experienced when you were first diagnosed, such as headaches, nausea, drowsiness, confusion or forgetfulness. Steroids are often prescribed to relieve these symptoms. You will be provided with more information about steroids if they are prescribed for you.

Skin Reaction

A skin reaction may occur in the treated area. It is not uncommon for the scalp area to become sore. By the end of the treatment your skin in the treated area will probably be itchy, dry and reddened. You are advised to take the following precautions:

- + Wash your hair gently, at most once a week with an un-perfumed (baby) shampoo.
- + Gently pat hair with a towel and let it dry naturally in a warm room.
- + Only use a hairdryer on cool setting, as heat can irritate the scalp.
- + Protect your head from sunlight.
- + You may gently bathe or shower using warm water
- + Protect the skin from wind, sun and direct heat, by wearing a hat / cap / scarf made preferably from natural fibres such as cotton.
- + **Do not** expose skin to hot water bottles, ice packs etc.
- + **Do not** rub or scratch the area, as this will only exacerbate the reaction.

If your skin becomes uncomfortably dry, the radiation therapists can advise you on suitable creams to use.

Fatigue

Fatigue is another commonly experienced side effect of radiation therapy. It can range from a mild loss of energy to an overwhelming "bone-tired" feeling that is not always relieved by rest. You may feel sluggish and lacking in energy. Tiredness may interfere with your mood and can make other symptoms feel worse, so it is important that you:

- + Rest whenever you feel tired, particularly before and after treatment sessions.
- + Plan periods of exercise for those times when you feel most energetic. Gentle exercise such as walking 2-3 times a week can help reduce fatigue.
- + Do the things that you enjoy and that make you feel good whether it is reading, visiting with friends or spending time outdoors.
- + Set aside part of the day when you can have time for yourself, and if you wish, continues any quiet interests that you had before your illness.
- + Maintain a healthy balanced diet.

You may be tired for several months after you finish radiation therapy.

It is difficult to get through a long course of treatment without feeling low at some point, and it is quite normal to feel up and down during radiation therapy and for several weeks afterwards. Please let us know when things get tough and we will do our best to help you.

It is important to increase your fluid intake while on treatment. Try to increase your daily intake by at least three glasses. Include fluids such as water, milk and juices. Do not include tea, coffee, or caffeine drinks.

Hair Loss

Hair loss only occurs in the area of the head that is being treated. Generally hair will start to fall out after treatment has commenced. Hair tends to come out in clumps, in an irregular pattern. You may notice it on your pillow in the morning or on your hairbrush or comb. Hair will usually begin to grow back three months after completing radiation therapy, however this growth may be patchy. Re-growth will depend on the area treated and the dose of radiation given. Please remember that everyone is different and therefore there are no definite answers regarding time frames and degree of re-growth.

Nausea

Nausea may occur during the period of treatment, sufficient rest, a balanced diet and a good fluid intake will help to minimise nausea. If nausea persists, try eating small meals more frequently during the day. A simple anti-sickness medication can be prescribed for you if necessary. Please speak to the radiation therapists about this.