

# Radiation Side Effects: Brain

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## **What side effects can I expect from radiation therapy?**

Side effects from radiation therapy vary from person to person and depend on the part of the body being treated, the dose of radiation given, the size of the treatment area and if you are receiving chemotherapy prior, during or after radiation. Side effects may happen with radiation therapy because the high doses of radiation used to kill cancer cells can also damage healthy cells in the treatment area. Some people have more intense side effects whereas others have none at all. Your team will discuss the specific side effects they anticipate you to experience.

## **What skin changes may occur?**

Skin changes can occur in the area being treated with radiation. Make sure to keep the area being treated clean and dry prior to your radiation treatments. Do not apply any moisturizers, ointments, deodorants, powders, or cosmetics to this area. You may continue to bathe or shower as you have been however we recommend using a mild soap, rinse and pat dry. Skin changes from radiation usually don't occur until a few weeks into your radiation treatments. Please discuss skin care as well as recommended skin care products with your medical team.

## **Will I experience fatigue?**

Fatigue is a very common side effect from radiation therapy and you will probably experience it at some point during your radiation treatments. Typically, patients will feel most fatigued toward the end of radiation. Fatigue includes feelings of tiredness, exhaustion, and/or decreased amount of energy to complete tasks. Make sure you are getting adequate amount of sleep at

night aiming for 8 hours per night. Maintain a balanced, nutritious diet and incorporate some sort of exercise which often helps to decrease fatigue. Pace activities or group them together and take rest periods when needed or an earlier bedtime. Allow others to help you with tasks or errands. Fatigue usually continues well after radiation has completed, approximately 6-8 weeks, and sometimes even longer for some.

### **Will there be hair loss in the treatment area?**

Radiation can cause hair loss in the treatment area because radiation can damage quickly dividing cells such as those in your hair root. Hair loss in the treatment area usually begins approximately 2-3 weeks after treatments begin.

Hair loss can continue for up to a month after treatment is completed.

Radiation, unlike chemotherapy, can cause patchy hair loss-but only in the treatment area. Regrowth can take up to 3-6 months after treatment has been completed, but sometimes hair doesn't grow back. When your hair does grow back, your texture may be different.

Before hair loss occurs it is important to decide whether you may want to cut or shave your hair and/or buy a wig (so you can match the color and style of hair prior to hair loss occurring). During radiation use mild shampoos and if scalp become itchy you may use a moisturizer after radiation to soothe and moisturize the dry skin. Please discuss with your doctor or nurse what creams or ointments they recommend.

### **Will I experience nausea and vomiting?**

Nausea and vomiting can result from radiation treatments to the abdomen, small intestine, colon, or brain. It may be intermittent, persistent or associated with radiation treatments. For example, you may notice nausea a few hours after treatment each day. It can continue after radiation is completed for

approximately 2 weeks. You may find it helpful to eat frequent, small meals or snacks. Eat foods that are bland and easily digested (for example bananas, rice, applesauce, toast or crackers, clear broths, yogurt). Drink plenty of liquids especially if you are vomiting (Gatorade®, ginger ale or 7-up®, broth). If symptoms persist, notify your physician or nurse about medication to relieve nausea and vomiting.

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