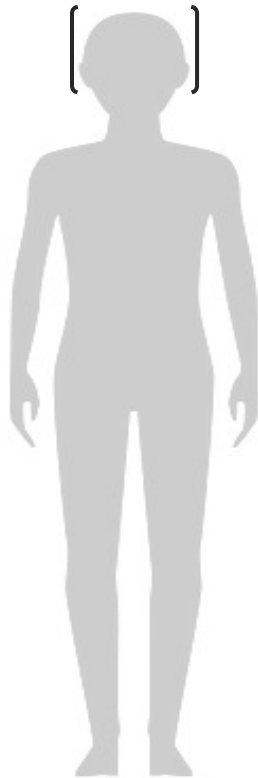


Care of Radiation Therapy Side Effects: Brain

We are giving you this information to support you and make your treatment as comfortable and successful as possible. If you have questions, please ask your BC Cancer health care team.



Appointments and Scheduling

- Patient identification policy: For your safety, we will check your identity before every test, procedure or treatment, including radiation therapy. We will ask you for your name and date of birth, or to see your photo identification.
- There are no appointments on weekends or statutory holidays.
- Appointments may change on short notice. If you are an out-of-town patient, please allow for some flexibility in your travel arrangements and accommodations.

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Driving

You are not allowed to drive if you have a recent history of seizures. Also, it may not be safe for you to drive if you have:

- Visual impairment (you cannot see well)
- Muscle weakness
- Memory and attention deficit (you cannot remember things well or pay attention for long periods of time)
- General tiredness (fatigue) related to your treatment.

Talk to your BC Cancer health care team about driving. If you need help getting to your appointments, you can find more information on the Transportation & Lodging page on the BC Cancer website:

www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/practical-support/transportation-lodging

Side Effects

Radiation treatment damages cancer cells but can also affect normal tissues in the treatment area. Damage to normal tissues may cause side effects.

These side effects will vary depending on:

- The amount of radiation prescribed.
- The area of your body being treated.
- The size of the treatment area.
- Whether or not you are having chemotherapy.

Your BC Cancer health care team will explain which side effects you may have during or after your treatment. You will see a nurse or a doctor regularly during your treatment to talk about your radiation side effects. The doctor you see may not be your radiation oncologist.

If you have a problem or concern between visits with the nurse or doctor, please talk to your radiation therapists who can help you right away.

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Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of extreme tiredness. If you are fatigued, you may want to rest and sleep more than is normal for you.

There are many causes of fatigue:

- Radiation therapy
- Previous treatments
- Emotional stress
- Changes in lifestyle

You may be able to continue your normal lifestyle or you may need to adjust your routine according to your energy level. For more information, go to the Managing Fatigue page on the BC Cancer website:

www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/managing-symptoms-side-effects/fatigue-tiredness

Scalp and Hair Care

A skin reaction, as well as hair loss, in the treated area is possible. The area of your scalp being treated may become warm, dry or itchy. It may change colour (become pink, red, darker or tanned looking) and you may lose hair in the treated area.

Most skin reactions begin within the first week or so of starting treatment, but timing can be different for each person. Some people do not have a skin reaction until after their radiation treatment is finished.

Skin reactions usually go away a few weeks after your final treatment. Some skin changes, like skin darkening or scarring, can be permanent (they will never go away).

Here are some tips to protect your skin and help it feel better:

Lifestyle and well-being

- Be very gentle with your hair and the skin in the treated area.

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- Cover your head with a hat or scarf to protect your scalp from wind and direct sunlight.
- If you cannot cover the area, use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.
- It is okay to swim as long as your skin is not broken or irritated. It is best to shower right away after swimming. Gently wash off the chlorine, pat dry and apply moisturizer.

Hygiene and moisturizing

- Keep your exposed skin moisturized to prevent dryness. There is no evidence that any cream or product is better for this. If you like a certain product or brand, please continue to use it.
- If you do not have a moisturizer, we recommend one that is water-based (water or aqua is the first ingredient on the list).
- Once you start your treatment, use the moisturizer many times each day.
- When you bathe or shower, use warm water (not hot) and pat dry with a soft towel.
- You can use your normal shampoo but you should be gentle.
- If you are having a skin reaction, your BC Cancer health care team may ask you to use a steroid-based cream or antibiotic on the treated area.

'Do Nots' for the treatment area

- Do not use dyes, perm products and hair-styling products such as gel, mousse or hairspray.
- Avoid extremes of hot or cold (heating pads, ice packs, saunas, and others).
- Do not rub, scratch, or massage the treated skin.

Hair Loss

Hair follicles are very sensitive to radiation. You may start to notice hair loss within the treatment area(s) 10-14 days after radiation starts. The amount of hair you lose will depend on the size and location of the treated areas and the dose of radiation that you receive.

You may lose patches of hair. This is because the radiation beams point in different directions. Hair loss may be temporary (it will grow back) or permanent (it will never grow back). This depends on the amount of radiation you receive. If the hair loss is temporary, it should start to re-grow 3-6 months after radiation treatment is complete.

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If you want to, consider head coverings that you will be most comfortable with, such as turbans, hats, wigs and scarves.

If you choose to wear a wig, you may want to try some on before you lose your hair. This is especially important if you want the best possible match.

If you have had a mask made for radiation treatment, check with your BC Cancer health care team before making changes to your hairstyle. A significant change may affect the fit of your mask.

Headache

Please tell your BC Cancer health care team if you start having headaches during treatment. If you have headaches before starting treatment, please tell them if your headaches happen more often or become more painful during treatment.

If you are taking dexamethasone (Decadron), you must keep taking it as you've been told to. Do not change your dose without talking to your radiation oncologist.

Nausea and Vomiting

If you have nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) or vomiting, please tell your BC Cancer health care team. Your team can change your medication(s) to help your symptoms.

Changes in Sensation or Movement

It is important to tell your BC Cancer health care team as soon as possible if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Blurry or double vision
- Hearing loss or ringing in your ears
- Trouble speaking
- Weakness, numbness or tingling of your face, chest, stomach area, back, arms or legs
- Dizziness, a loss of balance, or an unsteady walk
- Seizures or 'blackouts'

***If you have these symptoms on a day that you do not have treatment (weekends/holidays), please call your family doctor or call the radiation oncologist on call. In an emergency, call 9-1-1.**

Care of Radiation Therapy Side Effects: Brain

Pain

If you have pain from your cancer or its treatment, please tell your BC Cancer health care team. Also, go to the Pain from Cancer page on the BC Cancer website: www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/managing-symptoms-side-effects/pain-from-cancer

Support Services

BC Cancer helps those living with or affected by cancer to cope with the physical, practical, emotional, and psychological aspects of their care.

- Resources can be found on our website: www.bccancer.bc.ca/coping
- Regional patient and family counselling and support groups are available: www.bccancer.bc.ca/supportprograms
- Online support is available at: www.cancerchatcanada.ca

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your BC Cancer health care team

Alcohol and Smoking

Please try not to smoke during your treatment. Smoking may cause more irritation and increase the side effects you experience.

Stopping smoking has major and immediate benefits for people of all ages. It:

- Helps improve your body's ability to heal.
- Improves your body's response to cancer treatment.
- Lowers the risk of your cancer returning or another cancer developing.
- Lowers your risk of pneumonia and respiratory failure (when your lungs cannot work properly).

If you use tobacco or have recently quit, ask your BC Cancer health care team for more information. You can also go to the Smoking Cessation Program page on the BC Cancer website:

www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/smoking-cessation-program

Depending on the area of your body being treated, alcohol may worsen your side effects. Small amounts of alcohol may be fine for some people. Please check with your BC Cancer health care team.