

Radiation Therapy to the Brain and Skull

You are scheduled to receive radiation treatments designed specifically for you. The following guidelines will help you take an active part in your radiation therapy.

What to Expect During Treatment

Temporary Skin Changes

Temporary changes to your scalp and behind the ears may gradually occur. These may include redness, dryness, scaling, and itchiness of the treated area. These skin changes usually occur one to two weeks after your treatment begins and may last for one to two weeks after your last treatment.

- Moisturizers such as _____ may be applied to the treated area as needed. Do not use moisturizers within two hours before your radiation treatment.
- Use baby shampoo or a mild shampoo that is fragrance-free. These shampoos are less irritating to sensitive skin. You may gently massage the scalp when shampooing.
- Use the “cool” setting on your hair dryer. Cool air is less harsh to the skin than are warm or hot air.

Permanent Skin Changes

Permanent skin changes include increased sensitivity to summer and winter temperatures.

- Protect your scalp from the winter and summer weather. Wide-brimmed hats, scarves, or turbans are options for summer or winter.
- If the area being treated is exposed to the sun, apply sunscreen routinely to the treatment site whenever you are outdoors for more than 10 minutes during the summer or winter. A PABA-free sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 should be used. Since the area being treated will be more sensitive than the rest of your skin, protect the area from sun exposure after your treatment ends.

Hair Thinning and Hair Loss

- Hair loss may be temporary or permanent, depending upon the dosage of radiation and your particular treatment plan. If your hair loss is temporary, it usually takes about three months before your hair will begin to grow back.
- Many people choose a wig or toupee that matches their hair color and style before hair loss begins. This can reduce the stress you may feel from a possible change in your appearance.
- Some insurance policies reimburse patients for hairpieces. If your policy does not cover these expenses, hairpieces may be tax-deductible. The American Cancer Society may also provide wigs or help with the cost. Please contact your local chapter of the American Cancer Society for more information.

Take Your Prescribed Medications

- Continue to take your prescribed medications — such as dexamethasone (Decadron®) or methylprednisolone (Medrol®) — which can control the side effects of swelling from brain tumors. Side effects of these medications may include nausea, headache, irritability, confusion, or seizures.

- Continue to take your antiseizure medications at the dose prescribed by your doctor.
- Do not stop taking these medications unless you have your doctor's permission. Refill your prescriptions before your supply runs low.

What to Ask Your Nurse or Doctor

Ask your nurse or doctor any questions you may have about the following:

- Products to moisturize the skin
- Medications
- Concerns about treatments or procedures
- Availability of support groups

Things to Report to Your Nurse or Doctor

Tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Redness or tenderness of the skin or scalp
- Itchiness of the skin
- Skin rashes
- Ear tenderness
- Throat tenderness
- Any new or unusual symptoms

Things to Report Immediately

Call **immediately** if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Seizures or unusual muscle twitching
- Confusion or decreased alertness
- Severe skin redness
- Change in personality
- Severe headache
- Changes in vision or balance

In An Emergency Call:
