

Side Effects of Brain Cancer Treatment



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Radiation therapy for brain cancer can cause side effects. A side effect is a negative or unwanted reaction to treatment. Most side effects come on slowly, usually starting about 1-2 weeks into treatment, and last for a few weeks after radiation therapy ends.

Common side effects

- › Hair loss. Hair loss usually begins 2 to 4 weeks after the first treatment and occurs only in the area being treated. It takes about a week for all the hair to fall out. Your hair may grow back 3 to 6 months after treatment ends. Hair almost always grows back; however, growth depends on the dose of radiation you received.
- › Scalp irritation. Your skin may become red and irritated, similar to a sunburn. Your radiation oncology team will recommend lotions to help manage scalp irritation.
- › Brain swelling. Brain inflammation may cause an increase in your brain tumor symptoms. Steroids are often used to reduce brain swelling. A medication called dexamethasone may be prescribed to decrease the inflammation. Dexamethasone may cause increased appetite (or hunger), increased urination, fluid retention, leg cramps, and mood changes. These side effects, which are expected and temporary, should be reported to your oncology team.
- › Fatigue. You may become extremely tired, especially in the later weeks of radiation therapy. Fatigue can be managed with a balance of rest and exercise. Aim for 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night and 20 to 30 minutes of exercise as tolerated.



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