

Hair loss – Alopecia

Radiation to the scalp will only cause hair loss in the specific treatment area. This often occurs 10-14 days from beginning treatment.

Hair loss may continue once treatment has finished. If there is hair loss, it's gradual. It thins and then becomes patchy. Often hair will grow back, but it can be thinner, a different texture and/or colour.

Some hair loss can be permanent which can be difficult. Please discuss with our nurses for further support. **The Cancer Society has some great resources for wig options and the 'Look Good Feel Better' programme.**

Nausea, vomiting and headaches

Radiation therapy or the tumour can cause inflammation and swelling. The pressure against your skull is what can cause nausea, vomiting and headaches. This can occur from the beginning of treatment or you may already be experiencing this after your surgery.

You may be prescribed dexamethasone (Steroid) when required to help control these symptoms.

Dexamethasone

- If you are not already on dexamethasone you could be prescribed this before starting radiation therapy or as and when symptoms of brain pressure occur.
- Take this medication with food as it can upset your stomach.
- Do not adjust or stop the medication without being advised to do so by your oncology team.
- Your dose may need to increase during treatment to help control your symptoms.
- Once you are well enough you will be advised to slowly decrease your dose in a step-by-step manner by the oncology team.

Common temporary side effects of Dexamethasone can include:

- Increased appetite
- Weight gain
- Facial swelling /cushingoid appearance
- Fluid retention – swelling in feet and ankles
- Raised blood sugar levels with increased urination
- Difficulty sleeping
- Muscle weakness
- Leg cramps
- Mood changes.

Otitis - Ear irritation /inflammation

Note: only if your treatment volume includes the ear area (ask your team if unsure).

Radiation may cause inflammation or infection of the ear. You may notice these symptoms:

- changes in your hearing
- ringing in your ear
- ear pain
- Feeling of fullness of the ear
- discharge from your ear.

Please let your team know if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

In accordance with NZTA guidelines you are not allowed to drive until further notice unless you are advised otherwise by your Oncologist.

References

SCoR—The Society and College of Radiographers, 2021. <https://www.sor.org/news/scor-updates-radiation-dermatitis-guidelines>

Illustrated panels from the above reference

Radiation Therapy to the Brain: Side Effects Overview

Radiation therapy can cause side effects in your treatment area which can vary from patient to patient. The Radiation Oncologist will have discussed the possible short and long term side effects with you during the consent process.

This brochure explains the short term side effects. These symptoms can begin during a course of radiation therapy and may even peak 1-2 weeks after a treatment course is complete. They should have settled around 6 weeks after treatment.

The oncology nurses will see you on day one or two of your treatment to discuss any concerns or questions you have. Further assessments can be arranged at this time.

Welcome Haere Mai | Respect Manaaki
Together Tūhono | Aim High Angamua

Most Common treatment / tumour side effects during your course of treatment

- Fatigue
- Skin reactions
- Hair loss - Alopecia
- Nausea / vomiting / headaches
- Ear irritation / inflammation
- Seizures
- Worsening neurological symptoms.

We're here to help!

Every day a radiation therapist will ask how you are. Please do not hesitate to voice any concerns. If you're experiencing any of these side effects (not limited to this list), we can refer you to our oncology nurses to discuss further.

For more information refer to this online resource:

www.braintumoursupport.org.nz

Contacts

Regional Blood and Cancer Service

Building 8, Level 4, Auckland City Hospital

Auckland DHB

Phone: 09 307 4949

Reception ext 22631

Nurses ext 22837

Acute Oncology ext 23826 (Mon-Fri 8-4pm)

Nurse Specialist - 0212415030

Fatigue

There are many contributing factors that will cause tiredness

- The effect of treatment on normal cells
- Stress related to your illness
- Daily travel to treatment
- Balancing life outside your treatment
- Financial concerns.

Suggestions:

- Ensure you're eating a balanced diet (additional supplements are **not** recommended, unless prescribed by your oncology team)
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest and gentle exercise (e.g. walking)
- Practice self care (personal techniques that help you relax)
- Accept help from others.

Skin Reactions

Your head may develop a skin reaction where the treatment is. It will not happen straight away but tends to develop gradually throughout treatment and usually starts to settle 2-4 weeks after treatment finishes.



gradually become
pinker or darker



feel dry or
tight, and sore



develop a rash
and feel itchy



blister or peel

Skin care advice

Skin reactions can't be prevented however there are things you can do to help yourself feel more comfortable.

Tell your radiation therapist or nurse about your skin care routine. They will let you know if any changes are advised.



Note: Please do not use sunscreen during treatment

Hygiene and moisturising

- Continue to shower/wash your hair as normal with a gentle shampoo (baby hair products recommended).
- If your head becomes red or itchy please see our oncology nurses for a moisturiser.



washing and bathing

Make sure the water is not too hot; wash the skin gently with products you would normally use and gently pat dry

'DON'Ts' for the treatment area

Please avoid...



rubbing
the area



using sticky tape



shaving



using wax,
cream or lasers



using
make-up