



*You will be receiving radiation therapy to your head. The side effects from the treatment may be fatigue, hair loss, skin irritation, and possibly some ear stuffiness. Measures that you can take to minimize these side effects are listed below.*

# Head Radiation Therapy

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR PATIENTS RECEIVING RADIATION THERAPY TO THE HEAD



**Hair Care:** Feel free to wash your hair as you normally would. We suggest that you use a mild shampoo and gently wash the hair. Avoid excessive use of hair dryers, rollers, hairpins, and hairspray. It is important not to color your hair or get a permanent.



**Hair Loss:** You may experience some hair loss, which may be temporary or permanent. The hair loss will occur in the area where you are being treated. The hair loss usually happens towards the middle to end of treatment. You may want to get a wig or hairpiece that matches your hair color before you lose your hair. If you are looking for a hairpiece or wig, ask your nurse and your hairdresser for names of people and places that specialize in hairpieces. There are turbans and scarves also available in many different styles and colors.



**Skin Care:** It is okay to bathe or shower daily with a mild soap. Wash the treatment area gently. Do not scrub the skin. If you have ink marks on your skin, please do not wash them off. Gently pat the skin dry.

During the course of your radiation therapy treatments, we ask that you put nothing on the skin in the treatment area except for the products recommended by the physician or nurse. Use moisturizers for dryness and over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream for itchiness. Apply products twice daily or as needed. We do not want the skin “greasy” when you come in for treatment.

Avoid the use of hot or cold in the treatment area. This includes the use of heating pads, hot packs, hot water bottles, ice packs, and ice bags. It is okay to use an electric blanket. Avoid the use of tape or Band-Aids in the treatment area.



**Sun Exposure:** During treatment, avoid exposing the skin in the treatment area to direct sunlight or tanning beds. If you plan on being in the sun for an extended period, cover the skin with clothing or broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. The skin in the treatment area will *always* be more sensitive to the sun and tanning beds.



**Ear Stuffiness:** Difficulty hearing or a full feeling in the ear (ear stuffiness) can occur. This is usually not a permanent problem. If this happens during treatment or afterward, please let us know.



**Fatigue:** Loss of energy is a common side effect of radiation therapy. Endurance, stamina, concentration, and motivation may all decrease as a result of fatigue. Conserve your energy and rest when you need to. Eat a well-balanced diet and stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Exercise such as walking or yoga can improve your energy. Respect your body's limitations—if you hurt while exercising, stop.



**Nutrition:** During your course of therapy, it is very important to maintain your weight. We suggest a diet high in protein and healthy fats. Your nurse will be checking your weight frequently. We can suggest food supplements if weight loss occurs. It is not unusual to notice a decrease in appetite during radiation therapy. You will need to make a conscious effort to maintain adequate calorie intake. Frequent, small meals (every 2-3 hours) may be tolerated better than three large meals a day.



**Duration:** Side effects may worsen the final week of treatment and the week after radiation treatments are completed. Most of these side effects gradually subside within 4-8 weeks after treatment. Please call our office if you have any questions at any time during or after your radiation treatments.



**If you notice any changes in vision, have more frequent headaches, more severe headaches, balance problems, or nausea and vomiting, please let your nurse or doctor know.**

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