Radiotherapy treatment to the whole central nervous system (brain and spinal cord)

The following information will help you understand your radiotherapy treatment and how to minimise any side effects. Every person is an individual and can react differently to radiotherapy. If you have any concerns about your treatment, our radiographers, nurses and consultants are here to help and guide you.

What is radiotherapy?
Radiotherapy is the use of high energy X-rays to destroy cancer cells. Radiation cannot be seen and is entirely painless. Treatment is generally given as a course over several weeks. Each daily treatment can take up to an hour.

Radiotherapy treatment is aimed at the affected area but will also involve some surrounding healthy tissue. However, cancer cells are more sensitive to radiation and will be destroyed, while normal cells are able to repair themselves.

What are the likely side effects?
You may experience some hair loss in the treatment area, usually about halfway through the course of treatment. Hair loss is often temporary but your hair can take some time to grow back. Occasionally hair loss is permanent.

You may have headaches and/or feel sick during your treatment. Talk to your radiographer or nurse as they will be able to arrange medication to manage these symptoms.

Radiotherapy can make you feel tired – make sure you rest as much as you need to and drink plenty of fluids.

Skin care
While you are having treatment you will need to see the nurse weekly for advice on skin care. The skin in the treatment area may become dry, red and sore. To help reduce this, we recommend you follow these basic instructions:

- Wash the skin in the treatment area with lukewarm water and Simple soap.
- Wash your hair with a (mild) baby shampoo and warm water once a week.
- Have a shower rather than a bath.
- Don’t rub the skin – gently pat it dry.
- Don’t use a hair dryer.
- Only use hair products, creams or ointments in the treatment area that have been suggested by staff.
- Protect the skin from cold, wind or direct sun by wearing a soft hat or scarf.
- Don’t use adhesive tapes or dressings in the treatment area.
- An aloe vera gel and oil mixture is advised to nourish and protect the skin in the treatment area.
General advice

It’s important that you continue to take any medication prescribed by your doctor unless he or she tells you otherwise. If you experience any changes to your mobility, or if your symptoms get worse, please tell the radiographers or your consultant at your next visit. You will have regular blood tests during the course of treatment. This is to monitor the number of different blood cells which can change as a result of the treatment, which may cause a lower immune system.

Nutritional advice

Eat a healthy, balanced diet and increase your normal fluid intake. If you are losing weight or have difficulty eating, tell the radiographers who will refer you to a dietitian.

Support services

Radiotherapy treatment at Bupa Cromwell Hospital also includes eight counselling sessions. These are available for all patients and relatives. You will see your consultant regularly during the course of treatment.

Follow-up

Your consultant will discuss follow-up appointments with you as you will require regular check-ups.

Contact

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact us:

Radiotherapy reception +44 (0)20 7460 5626/7
Hospital switchboard +44 (0)20 7460 2000

If the Radiotherapy department is unavailable please contact the Oncology ward on +44 (0)20 7460 5992.