

Kent Oncology Centre
**Radiotherapy Side Effects and
Management: Brain**
Information for patients

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the side effects that may occur when having external radiotherapy to the brain. It also explains the best management of these side effects. If you would like to speak to one of the radiotherapy team please feel free to contact them on the numbers given below:

Maidstone Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists
Appointment enquiries

☎ 01622 225094
☎ 01622 225080

Kent & Canterbury Hospital

Macmillan Radiotherapy Specialists
Appointment enquiries

☎ 01227 766877
Ext 722 2711
☎ 01227 783010

You will be given a copy of our leaflet 'External Beam Radiotherapy' which we advise you to read alongside this leaflet; it provides general information about radiotherapy and useful contact numbers. If you have not been given a copy please ask. Our leaflets can also be found on the **Kent Oncology Centre website:** www.kentoncologycentre.nhs.uk

Side effects from external radiotherapy to the brain

Some side effects may occur, usually towards the end of the course of treatment and also during the first few weeks after treatment has finished. Treatments given over several weeks give more side effects than a short course of treatment.

These side effects can be upsetting and may require you to make some adjustments to your normal life, but most are temporary and will gradually disappear after a few weeks. However, some side effects may continue for, and some may only become apparent after, months or years following treatment. It is important to discuss these with your consultant as help may be available. Radiotherapy does not make you radioactive; it is safe to be with other people, including children, throughout your treatment.

Pregnant?

Please tell the medical staff if you might be pregnant; radiotherapy can harm the developing baby.

Short term side effects

You will be monitored throughout your treatment by the radiotherapy team. Please let them know if you experience any of the following problems:

Tiredness

Radiotherapy can make you tired so you may need more rest than usual, especially if you have to travel a long way for treatment every day. It is good to try to get some exercise each day, however gentle.

Four to ten weeks after finishing radiotherapy you may find that you slow down, have very little energy and feel much less active. You may feel drowsy and spend more time sleeping. This gradually gets better over a few weeks.

Loss of appetite

Some people lose their appetite as an effect of radiotherapy. It is often better to try to eat little and often. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids e.g. water, squash, fruit juice, milk and soup. If you struggle to eat much, it is a good idea to supplement your meals with nutritious high-calorie drinks. These are available on prescription or can be bought from the chemists.

Occasionally radiotherapy can cause nausea (feeling sick). This is often helped by drinking more fluids but medication can be prescribed if necessary.

Headaches/seizures

Some people experience headaches and/or seizures while they are having their radiotherapy. These can be controlled with painkillers and steroids which will be prescribed and monitored by your consultant. You may also be prescribed anti-convulsant tablets.

Hair loss

You will lose your hair in the treated area. Most hair loss is temporary, usually starting to grow back within two to three months of finishing treatment, but for some people this is permanent. This depends on the dose of treatment you receive. Hair only falls out where the x-ray beam enters and leaves the body. Sometimes hair grows back with a slightly different colour and texture and perhaps not as thickly as before. You can be referred for a wig consultation; please ask about this.

Skin changes

Skin reactions in the treatment area should be mild, with slight redness and itching, but your skin reaction can be affected by the dose and type of treatment that your consultant has prescribed. It can also be dependent on your type of skin, your shape, any existing conditions such as diabetes and especially if you smoke. Advice can be provided to help you stop smoking.

Tips for helping your skin include:

- Wash your scalp and hair gently with lukewarm water and a baby shampoo and pat dry.
- If required moisturise skin across the forehead and around the ears with a moisturiser.
- Avoid exposing the area to extremes of temperature such as hair dryers (unless on a cool setting), heat pads, saunas or ice packs during treatment.

The skin on your head is sensitive so it is best not to over-expose it to the sun or cold winds. Try wearing a soft cotton or silk scarf or hat to cover the area when you go outside.

Worsening symptoms

Some people find the symptoms of the brain tumour temporarily get worse after the treatment has finished, leading them to think the tumour is getting worse. This is often a reaction to the radiotherapy or may be because steroid treatment has been reduced or stopped.

If you find this is happening to you, or you have concerns about any continuing side effects, it is important to discuss it with your consultant, nurse specialist or radiographer who will be able to provide the right treatment and support.

Please note: if you are having radiotherapy to your brain you may be unable to drive. Your consultant will advise you as you may be legally required to inform the DVLA of your condition.

Please use this space to write any notes or questions you may have.



Contact details

Kent Oncology Macmillan Cancer Information Centre, Maidstone Hospital

Offers support and information to anyone who has concerns about cancer (patients, relatives, friends or carers).

☎ 01622 227064

Macmillan Cancer Support

Provide practical, medical and financial information

☎ 0808 808 0000 (Freephone)

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research

This charity provides information about cancer, treatment and clinical trials.

☎ 0808 800 4040

Website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Patient Experience Teams (PALS) for East Kent patients

Kent and Canterbury Hospital

Desk at the outpatient's entrance of the hospital

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital

Office at the main entrance of the hospital (Ramsgate Road)

William Harvey Hospital

Desk at the main entrance of the hospital

☎ 01227 783145 or 01227 864314

Email: ekh-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

*The information in this leaflet has been taken from information provided by Macmillan Cancer Support.

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

Telephone: ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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