

Moving oncology care forward so that you can look forward to life's moments

*Advice for patients
receiving radiation
treatment to the head*



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Radiation treatment to the head may cause hair loss in the area being treated. For most people, hair loss occurs a couple of weeks after the treatment has started, and is a gradual process over a few days.

Hair growth after radiation treatment depends on the dose received and the number of treatments given. It can take up to six to 12 months to regrow and may be patchy for a while. When your hair regrows, it may be a different texture or colour than before the treatment. Please ask a radiotherapist, your oncologist or the oncology nurses for further information on obtaining a wig and tying scarves.

Some people receiving radiation treatment may experience a skin reaction in the area being treated. Skin reactions vary from none to a sunburn-like reaction where the skin becomes reddened, dry and sometimes itchy.

The radiotherapists on the treatment machines will keep a close eye on the condition of your skin during your treatment and can further advise you if a reaction appears. There are several things you can do to minimise skin reactions:

What to do

	Bath or shower as normal using warm rather than hot water. Allow the water to gently run over the area being treated.
	Use a mild shampoo e.g. baby shampoo (Elizabeth Anne's baby shampoo – not the oil) or one recommended by your oncologist.
	Shower in the evenings. If showering in the morning, ensure it is four to six hours before treatment.
	Do not rub the treated area. Friction aggravates the skin reaction. Dry it carefully by patting the area with a soft towel.
	Avoid exposing the treated area to excessive heat e.g. hair dryers or hot rollers and avoid any hair care aids that combine bleach, peroxide, alcohol, lacquer or other harsh chemicals.
	You may use baby powder on the area being treated, preferably antiseptic powder.



What to do



Protect your scalp from the elements by wearing a scarf, hat or wig. Even when you have finished treatment, the treated area will always be more sensitive to the sun, so wear a hat or use sunscreen SPF 15+ (once treatment has been completed) on your exposed scalp.



Wait at least six months after hair regrowth before having any chemical treatments to your hair e.g. perm or colour. This reduces the chance of your hair becoming brittle or frizzy. Discuss this with your hairdresser.



If you are taking any vitamin supplements, please speak to your oncologist as to which supplements you can continue taking during treatment.



It is common for patients receiving radiation to feel more tired than usual. This is a normal side-effect of radiation treatment.



Your oncologist will see you once a week whilst you are on treatment. They may advise on, or prescribe creams and medications to help relieve symptoms.



Do not hesitate to ask a radiotherapist or your radiation oncologist if you have any questions or are experiencing any problems.



Please inform your oncologist if you are taking any other treatments as these may reduce the effectiveness of your radiotherapy treatment or aggravate any side-effects.

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