Radiation treatment to the brain

Radiation treatment of the brain has some common and expected side effects. In general, the normal brain tissue is quite resistant to radiation. The goal of treatment is to destroy tumor tissue without harming normal brain tissue.

Radiation treatment to the brain causes hair loss. The hair loss begins about three weeks after treatment begins. Hair regrowth varies from person to person and starts about four months after completing treatment. The hair that grows back may have a slightly different color and texture.

The skin will become darker, dryer and reddened in treatment areas. Try to keep the areas as dry as possible. Cornstarch powder can be helpful for this problem. Showers or mildly warm baths may be taken. Avoid overly hot water and remember not to scrub off the treatment marks. The forehead and top of the scalp are areas that usually get the most skin reaction during brain treatments. These areas may need special attention and medications if they get sore or very itchy. With time, the tanning and crusting from the radiation will fade and the skin will return to a more normal color.

Treatments will very likely make you feel tired and less energetic. This is one of the most common side effects with brain treatment. Naps may be necessary. Exercise is encouraged, but should not be overdone. Energy level gradually improves after treatment is completed and should return to pre-treatment level in three to four weeks.

Many patients wear wigs or other head coverings after they lose their hair. It is alright to use mild shampoos during treatment. It is important to avoid exposing the scalp to sun or wind. Hats and sunblock should be worn outside.

Steroids
Steroids may be used while radiation treatment is being given to the brain and spinal column. Steroids are used to decrease inflammation and swelling around tumor sites and to improve symptoms. Steroid dose will gradually be decreased by the doctor. Steroids should not be stopped abruptly.