

Side Effects

Side effects may occur one to three weeks following the start of radiation therapy. Some of these are expected and can be temporary. During your consultation, a complete list of the early and late side effects will be reviewed. Please discuss problems or concerns about side effects or any part of your treatment with your doctor, therapist or nurse.

Fatigue is the number one side effect experienced by patients undergoing radiation therapy. According to the American Cancer Society, fatigue is defined as “the feeling of being tired physically, mentally and emotionally.”

Cancer-related fatigue is different from the fatigue of everyday life, which is usually short-term and relieved by rest. It is important to let your doctor know if you are feeling more fatigued than usual so that treatment can be directed at the cause. For example, if anemia (low red blood cell count) is thought to be causing fatigue, the anemia can be treated. Increased physical activity, treating sleep problems and good nutrition all seem to improve fatigue.

Other possible side effects of radiation treatment will vary according to the site being treated. Your health care team will thoroughly review potential side effects and their treatment with you.