
Discharge Instructions for a Brain Tumor

You have been diagnosed with a brain tumor. This is the abnormal and uncontrolled growth of cells in the brain. Treatment for brain tumors may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or a combination of these. Be sure to follow all the instructions given to you by your healthcare providers. The guidelines here are for general care.

Make sure you:

- Understand what you can and cannot do
- Keep your follow-up appointments
- Call your healthcare provider if you have any questions or are concerned about any symptoms or changes in how you feel

Home care after surgery

Surgery is often done to diagnose or remove some or all of a brain tumor. Surgery is done through a small or large opening (craniotomy) in your skull. Recovery depends on many things, such as your overall health, the size of the tumor, where the tumor is in your brain, and the extent of the surgery. Talk with your healthcare provider about what to do at home following surgery. They may recommend the following:

- Slowly increase your activity.
- Don't drive until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- If you have stitches or staples, ask when they'll be removed.
- Care for the incision and change any dressings as instructed.
- Shower or bathe as instructed by your healthcare team. Once your team says it's OK, you may wash your hair with mild soap. Pat the surgery area dry. Don't use oils, powders, lotions, or creams on your incision.
- Don't lift anything heavy until you're told you can.
- Take your medicines exactly as directed. If you have side effects, call your healthcare provider. Don't stop taking your medicines.
- Check the medicines you may be sent home with. It's possible you may already have the medicine at home. Pay special attention so you don't take an extra dose of your medicine.
- You may need to be weaned off certain medicines such as steroids and antiseizure medicine. Make sure to get clear instructions from your healthcare provider.

Home care after chemotherapy

Chemotherapy side effects depend on the types and doses of the medicines and how you get them. Talk with your healthcare provider about what to do at home after getting chemotherapy for a brain tumor. They will likely advise the following:

Prevent mouth sores

Many people get mouth sores during chemotherapy. So, don't be discouraged if you do, even if you are following all your healthcare provider's instructions. Do the following to help prevent mouth sores or to ease discomfort:

- Brush your teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush after every meal.
- Don't use dental floss if your platelet count is low because you'll be at increased risk of bleeding. Your healthcare provider will tell you if this is the case.
- Use an oral swab or special soft toothbrush if your gums bleed during regular brushing.
- Use any mouthwashes given to you as directed.
- Use salt and baking soda to clean your mouth. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda with a quart of water. Swish and spit as often as you like.
- Look for white patches in your mouth and on your tongue. This can be a sign of fungal infection, a common side effect of chemotherapy. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about these patches. You may need medicine to help you fight the fungal infection.

Manage other side effects

- It's normal to feel tired. Ask your healthcare provider about exercise. Exercise keeps you strong and keeps your heart and lungs active. It also helps reduce fatigue. Try to take a walk every day.
- Let your healthcare provider know if you have a fever or your throat is sore. You may have an infection that needs treatment.
- Remember, many people feel sick and lose their appetites during treatment. Eat small meals several times a day to keep up your strength:
 - Choose bland foods with little taste or smell if you are reacting strongly to food.
 - Be sure to cook all food thoroughly. This kills bacteria and helps you prevent infection.
 - Eat foods that are soft. They are less likely to cause mouth, throat, and stomach irritation.
- Keep clean. During treatment, your body can't fight germs very well:
 - Wash your hands often with soap and clean water. Be sure to wash your hands after using the bathroom and before eating.
 - Take short baths or showers with warm water. Don't use very hot or cold water.
 - Use moisturizing soap. Treatment can make your skin dry.
 - Use lotion several times a day to help relieve dry skin.

Home care after radiation therapy

Here's what to do at home after radiation therapy for a brain tumor:

Skin care

- Don't scrub or use soap on the treated area.
- Ask your therapy team which soaps, shampoo, and lotion to use.
- Protect the treated area from the sun. Ask your therapy team about using sunscreen.
- Don't remove ink marks unless your radiation therapist says it's OK. Don't scrub or use soap on the marks when you wash. Let the water run over them and pat them dry.
- Protect your skin from heat or cold. Don't use hot tubs, saunas, heating pads, or ice packs.

Other home care tips after treatment

- Stock up on easy-to-prepare foods.
- Eat foods high in protein and calories.
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids, unless directed otherwise.
- Ask your healthcare provider before taking any vitamins, minerals, herbs, or supplements.
- Be prepared for hair loss in the area being treated. Some people choose to get a wig or scarf.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following:

- Signs of infection around the surgical incision. These include redness, drainage, warmth, or pain.
- Incision opens up or pulls apart
- Confusion or hallucinations
- Fainting or blacking out
- Loss of memory or trouble speaking
- Double or blurred vision; partial or total loss of vision
- Numbness, tingling, or weakness in your face, arms, hands, legs, or feet
- Stiffness in your neck
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Chills
- Severe sensitivity to light (photophobia) or severe headache

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- Seizure
 - Trouble controlling your bowels or bladder
 - Headaches that don't go away, or get worse
 - Extreme tiredness (fatigue)
 - Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea that doesn't go away
 - New rash
 - Any pain, warmth, redness, or swelling in your lower legs or calves. This could be signs of a blood clot.
 - New cough or shortness of breath
 - Sore throat or white patches in your mouth
 - Pain or burning with urination
 - New or uncontrolled pain